



# Airborne from Edmonton

By *EUGENIE LOUISE MYLES*

Here we have the true tale, and as exciting as it is true, of how Edmonton, a remote frontier city in northwestern Canada, became the Plymouth of a new age of air discoveries and air conquests and air commerce. It is the story of how the dreams of her pioneer pilots were to be realized a thousand fold.

Beginning in 1909 with experimenting and exhibition stunting, and from that to air penetration of the north, the establishment of airmail service, the visits of noted foreign aviators, and especially the careers of its native pilots, all is described in detail. The gradual evolution of its first runways and hangar into a modern airport, and the rescue and mercy flights, as well as the establishment of passenger and freight services into the far north are presented with dramatic impact.

This is a book of great and glowing names: "Wop" May, Katherine Stinson, Captain Tailleur, "Punch" Dickins, Leigh Brintnell, Grant McConachie, Jimmy Bell, Matt Berry, Stan McMillan, H. Hollick-Kenyon, Walter Gilbert, Con Farrell, and many more. Drake and his brave and gallant peers sailing out of old Plymouth for the honour of their Queen would have been proud of them all. This book is especially timely in view of Edmonton's celebrations this year of Canadian aviation's fiftieth anniversary.



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*AIRBORNE*  
FROM  
EDMONTON



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*Being the true tale of how Edmonton, a remote frontier city in northwestern Canada, became the Plymouth of a new age of air discoveries and air conquests and air commerce, and of how the dreams of her pioneer pilots were to be realized a thousandfold.*

EUGENIE LOUISE MYLES



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## FORENOTE

This is the story of many men. It is the story of those pioneers who were the first to be airborne from Edmonton or who were among the first to be airborne in northwestern Canada. Limitations of space prevented the mention of all of their names and all of their achievements. Inasmuch as it is the story of experiences such as all shared, it is their story too.

This is the story of "bush" flying such as pioneer aviators and air engineers knew in many parts of the dominion, the records of which are being honoured across the country now that Canada has reached her golden age of flight.

*A day will come when beings who are now latent  
in our thoughts and hidden in our loins shall  
stand upon this earth as one stands upon a foot-  
stool, and shall laugh and reach out their hands  
amid the stars.*

—H. G. WELLS,  
*The Discovery of the Future* (1901)



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## 1919

THE NEAT BLACK car, 1914 model, inquisitively nosed its way in and out among the freshly-painted rows of long squat buildings perching on the circumference of the circular racetrack.

"Mm. All in shape again after the Big Victory Fair. Good enough. Our men had a big job on their hands getting ready for it. And a big job after, cleaning up the mess."

"No wonder, sir. It was the most successful fair in Edmonton's history, so the papers reported yesterday. My guess is that a lot of the credit for that goes to May and Gorman."

The second speaker, a slight young man with wide brown eyes, grinned as he added, "Quite a show they put on each day. Did you see May looping the loop eight times in succession? And doing the Falling Leaf?"

"Indeed yes. Absolutely fearless, that chap May."

A serious look shadowed the brown eyes. "To my notion, you know, that's not what aeroplanes should really be used for. Especially here in the west."

In the past hundred years this northern outpost of Edmonton had reached out long fingers to draw in the gleaming northern furs. By dog-team and canoe and river barge they had come, slowly, meanderingly, laboriously.

Why not now, beginning even in this victory year of 1919, use the aeroplane to reach out even longer fingers far and farther into the northern skyways, to draw in this natural wealth, furs and more furs, and perhaps even minerals?

Why not apply the lesson taught by the war that had recently ended? Instead of planes loaded with bombs going out, why not trappers' supplies, prospectors' gear? Instead of planes coming back empty, with bombs away, why not bundles of furs, homecoming traders, trappers, miners?

"What this city needs," the young man announced positively, squaring militarily shaped shoulders, "is an air harbour."



"Mm." The civic official in the car beside him, Engineer A. W. Haddow, did not say aloud what he may have been thinking. "You must be slightly wacky. Maybe that crack-up overseas, all that bombing, that nightly dodging of anti-aircraft fire, all that kind of thing may have left its mark on you."

Here in Edmonton, in the midsummer of 1919, the dead flat days that were the aftermath of this world war, days flat as these Exhibition Grounds and the park flanking it, were paralyzing this city and every city in the country.

This Edmonton needed many things, more utilities, paved streets, sidewalks, better buildings. It certainly did *not* need an air harbour.

"Yes. This city needs an air harbour," young Lieutenant Jimmy Bell, late of the Royal Air Force, repeated decisively. "You'll see. That day will come when she'll have to build one. I don't mean the kind of thing May has out on the St. Albert trail, a rough shed in a rough cow pasture. I mean a properly equipped harbour."

Was there any use trying to make concrete and tangible this vision of his in the mind of a city engineer who would necessarily have his eyes only on the ground, on vast networks of streets and roadways? Or under the ground, on vaster mole's tunnellings of waterpipes and sewers?

"And when that day comes," he dreamed aloud, "I would like to be the harbour-master."

It was going to take some doing, he reflected wistfully. This City Engineer Haddow would know that only too well. After the wild bursting here of the great prewar land boom, when sky-rocketing prices had plummeted just as surely dead earthward again, it would take a major miracle to convince the now-cautious burgesses to spend a large sum of money on a project so fantastic.

"If God intended men to fly, He'd have provided them with wings." So often he had heard that, so often he would still hear it.

Come to think of it, he had not been confirmed to air-mindedness himself in a matter of days. If it had not been for the grasping ambition of Kaiser Wilhelm, he would never himself have even dreamed of racing about in the upper air, the rightful home only of scudding clouds and skimming birds.

There was no denying it was truly a miracle what this World War had done for aviation. He recalled the very first aeroplanes he had set eyes on, back in 1909. Only ten years ago it was since he had seen them. So many amazing things had happened since, to himself and to the whole world, that it seemed like several times ten.

It had been at that first great air show at Doncaster, in the county of York in northeastern England. That 1909 display was an event so amazing it drew forty thousand people.

He was a student then, working on a course in agricultural engineering at the University of Leeds. His father came round to call for him.

"There's a big air show today, over at Doncaster. Care to go see it? Colonel Cody's going to be there and they've got at least a dozen other entries."

With the rest of the excited throng, some of whom had been up before dawn to make the journey, they joined the jamming crowds in picturesque Doncaster on the river Don. There, along the matted turf where the famous St. Leger race was run each year, were strewn thirteen wonder-working sky machines. At that moment they looked as earth-bound as many of the rows of new horseless cars parked along the roadsides.

Round about the aeroplanes milled some of the most celebrated sky-birds of the year.

Less than three months before, the great Frenchman Blériot had won the *Daily Mail* prize of £1000 for his successful crossing of the English channel. Now the crowds were disappointed to learn that Bleriot himself was not to be present and that a number of other famous flyers, including his fellow-countryman Paulhan, had entered instead in a rival meet down at Blackpool.

But a splendid contingent of Bleriot planes was spread out for display. And there to try their luck flying them was a plucky group of aviators, Delagrangé, Le Blon, Prevot, van der Burgh, Molon and Lovelace. As well, there were other colourful contenders for sky honours present, among them Sommer, flying a Farman, who was to establish the best record at Doncaster's week-long meet, Captain Maitland with his Voisin, and the celebrated Colonel Cody with his "Cathedral."

Around about this last pilot, Cody the famous showman, and his huge flying contraption, was centred the greatest interest of the galleries of spectators. At Farnborough the previous year Cody had made the first official powered flight in Britain. Only a few weeks before this meet he had improved his earlier record.

The sight of the great man recalled a cherished moment to Student Bell.

"Remember, Father, that day Colonel Cody made me a kite?"

"Yes, I remember," smiled his father.

Jimmy had been a small boy in his native village of Brighouse, near the city of Halifax. Show-manager Colonel Cody, who was playing the second-class circuits in a string of small theatres scattered about England, had brought to the village theatre a blood-and-thunder melodrama, entitled "Klondyke Nugget."

Attired in the fashion of his famous American namesake, Buffalo Bill Cody, the dashing showman wore his hair and beard long, and dressed in striking western costume of buckskin.

Even then Cody's heart had been in aeronautics. During hours away from the business of the stage, he devoted every minute of his time and every penny of his money to the building of huge man-carrying kites. In the quiet country villages and towns, he'd become a sensational figure. On the road with his shows, his favourite pastime during off-minutes was to build a replica of these box-kites for some star-eyed small boy.

In vain Cody had tried to interest army officials in his colossal flying contraptions, which would lift a man aloft in their larger-than-room dimensions and which he raised ingeniously by use of a winch.

Now Cody had turned to aeroplane building and flying. So enormous still was the scale of his flying machine, with spectacular arrangements of struts and wires, that it was quickly dubbed "Cody's Cathedral." Here at Doncaster, man and machine created a great stir, compounded of much good-natured fun-poking at the tremendous machine and sincere admiration of the inventive skill of the man.

At last, word was passed around that one of the machines was about to fly up into the air.

First, there were many time-consuming preparations. Some one loosed a toy balloon to test the speed of the wind. Some one else kindled a small fire so as to check, by the smoke, its direction.

At last, when it was still as death, a plane would begin to creep along the track, gradually pick up speed, then, unbelievably, rise slowly into the air. Faster and faster it climbed. Like a tireless falcon, it soared several hundred feet above the race course. Dizzily it circled about, zipping along in the heavens at perhaps forty miles an hour.

The crowd gaped. The crowd cheered. The plane descended. Again the crowd waited. In fact, mostly it waited. For another balloon. Another smoke signal. Another period of dead calm. Then another brief breath-taking flight.

Many times later when he was himself to take part in incredible aerial deeds, young Bell was smilingly to recall that Doncaster day, and that patient waiting, waiting, all that long afternoon. That waiting that was, perhaps, as significant as those first timid halting flights, signifying that humans might and could, in spite of themselves, become "air-minded."

"Why, I myself dreamt then that one day I'd be flying in one of those contraptions?" he mused nearly fifty years later. He shook his head.

"Never. Why, even just to look at an aeroplane then was exactly as if I were gazing at some amazing marvel. Something simply impossible to believe, say like the carcass of a whale suddenly spread before my eyes on this inland prairie outside the window here."

No more would he then have dreamed of leaving family, friends, connections, to cross an ocean and a continent.

After completing his course at the University, he found temporary employment doing land surveys in the pleasant counties of Nottingham and Lincoln. What he had really set his heart on was to secure a snug berth in the administrative office of some huge private estate. To impatient youth, the possibility of a senior man in one of these posts dying off to make room for him looked miserably remote.

Then one fateful day he happened to meet a former classmate.

"Hello, where have you been all this time?" he queried him.

"Where have I been? Why, over in Canada. Converting my knowledge of agricultural surveying to construction surveys. With a railway company."

"What's it like out there?" he persisted. "Or have you seen much of the country?"

"Rather, old chap. I've been way out west with Mackenzie and Mann's Canadian Northern railway, as far as a place in Alberta called Evansburg. Why not come out yourself, give it a try?"

"Well, I am a bit fed up," he admitted. "Waiting round here for something better to turn up. If I can book a passage, maybe I'll do just that."

At Winnipeg they parted company, his friend going on to resume his former employment. Jimmy was momentarily stranded. But his companion had made good his promise, giving him a lead as to how to go about finding a job.

Soon he, too, was busy on Mackenzie and Mann's ever-growing railway network. As an instrument man, he worked first on a new branch line being built in northern Manitoba, then from Port Arthur on the Great Lakes to Brandon doing revision of the main trans-continental artery.

Now the great tide of immigration, both preceding and following the gigantic rail expansion, was constantly sweeping farther westward into the Prairie Provinces.

Away out in north-central Alberta and strategically situated on the North Saskatchewan River, in the midst of a rich black-loam area, lay the tiny capital city of Edmonton. It was a shabby uncertain bud, nonetheless blessed by heady breezes and bedazzling suns in clear-blue skies. All at once it began to burst into a wide-flowering boom.

"Haven't you heard?" fellow-workers alerted Bell. "That in Edmonton, out on our main line, things are really humming. They're going to spend a colossal sum on developing their city. Right now."

"Sounds good. I'd like to be in on that kind of thing myself."

Young Jimmy Bell was instantly in action. After all, there must come a day of reckoning for all this costly running of rail lines into sparsely settled areas. A day of reckoning, and, maybe, a day of work stoppage.

He made inquiries. Sure enough. Engineering records suggested big programmes in store in the Edmonton of 1912 and the possibility of a job for an industrious instrument man. He volunteered for a couple of rail chores to be done in the Edmonton area and so got free transportation to the lively boom town.

He completed the jobs for the Canadian Northern, helping in the laying of a new spur from Edmonton to historic St. Albert, and another, within the city, to a west-end brewery. Now for a try at assisting in the city's grand expansion programme.

"Yes. We certainly can use you," City Engineer A. J. Latornell told him and promptly put him to work on new tunnel sewers being laid beneath Nelson Avenue near the penitentiary grounds.

Presently, tapped out on telegraph keys in a thousand empire cities, booming or stagnant, came the poignant words that interrupted or cut short so many promising careers.

Hurrying in that afternoon of August 4 from a cricket game in which a civilian team was doing its best to outbat and outrun a picked group from the Royal North-West Mounted Police, Engineer Jimmy



Bell joined the solemn-faced crowd that stood through the long hours peering over the latest ominous dispatches displayed outside the *Bulletin* office.

World War One had begun.

Whether or not Edmonton ever got all her sewers dug, there was only one course open now, to lay down instruments and enlist. So, in 1915, Jimmy found himself home in Britain again, a khaki-clad sergeant in the 63rd battalion, out of which he hoped to get himself quickly transferred to the engineers.

The colonel gave him leave to try. The interviewing officer at the war office listened with interest.

"Out in Canada, sir, I've been a railway and tunnel engineer. Don't you think I'd be more useful in the engineers?"

The word Canada connoted many things then in British ears. Some good, some bad perhaps. Still the name implied something young, fresh and interesting.

"Mm-mm. Canada. Tell me about it." The officer was eager to hear more and more of that far-away land of anticipated delight.

"Tell me, Bell, have you ever thought of flying?"

"Flying? Why, no, sir. Never." He had never been one to dream of reaching the moon.

This young man had already travelled far. He must have something. And he knew instruments. The officer was persuasive.

"I'd like you to think it over. How about a talk with the interviewing officer?"

The next interview followed a similar pattern. "Western Canada? Tell me about it." This officer too was athirst for information about the new world. In the old world the pressing need of the moment was for flyers, and more flyers, to outmatch the Hun airmen who were beginning to swarm over Allied skies in alarming numbers. "Now, how about a try at flying?"

"Well, sir, I've never thought of it. Perhaps," he added dubiously, "I might take a crack at it."

So he found himself transferred instead to the flying service. At Gosport School in Tern Hill, Shropshire, he studied aeronautics and navigation. Then at Stonehenge, within sight of the prehistoric stones, he advanced to the use of instruments and the night-flying that must have shaken the long-grounded ghosts of the ancient Druids.

It was then 1916 and the lumbering planes designed by Maurice and Henri Farman, the French flying pioneers, were being used for pilot-training.

"The Rumpety," the students promptly dubbed these, perhaps from the manner in which they wheeled, bumpety-rumpety, along the turf. Hurtling forward in these open-front Farmans was like riding, Student Jimmy noted uncomfortably, in the very nose of an Edmonton street-car that lacked sheltering windows.

Labouring day and night, the whirring factories were beginning to turn out more successful machines. Soon air pupils were being supplied with the new De Havilland 6. This they dramatically nicknamed "The Clutching Hand," because of the shape of the wings. Also appeared the FE2B or Farnborough Experimental flying machine, more gracefully christened the "Fee."

After just one hour and fifty minutes of tutoring, his instructor said to him, "All right, Bell. It's all yours now."

Without too much difficulty, he rose into the air. He soared about for twenty minutes and then attempted to land. That was the most tricky part of the business. Student Bell didn't figure it quite right.

"I miscalculated and landed fifteen feet above the ground," he reported afterward.

Fortunately, he was unhurt and the machine's undercarriage only was damaged.

He was given just a little more dual instruction. Not too much. The Hun was pressing furiously now and the need for airmen was desperate. If a man couldn't solo safely after eight hours' training, he had to be washed out.

Quickly now Second Lieutenant Bell passed the tests and found himself doing a stint of instructing.

Drastic changes were now beginning to be effected within the flying groups. Hitherto, all air units had been minor assisting divisions of the two great branches of the service, the army and the navy. The Royal Flying Corps with army rules and regulations was a subordinate arm of the army, while the Royal Naval Air Service supplemented naval activities.

"This won't do," decided the visionary General Arthur Trenchard. Presently his insistence on a radical change in set-up and his persistence in bringing it about was to win for Trenchard the well-earned title of "Father of the Royal Air Force."

As a result of his clear-sighted policy, in late 1917 the Independent Air Force was organized as a distinct and separate service with a status equal in every way to that of the army and the navy.

Quickly squadrons were formed to bomb the back areas of Germany, from whence were being channelled the munitions so generously supplied to the enemy lines. Flying by night, the British airmen fanned out to the great centres of the upper Rhine area, Stuttgart, Mainz, Frankfurt, Coblenz.

Mustered into one of these new units, Lieutenant Bell piloted one of the first new twin-engined bombers, a Handley Page V 1500, across the choppy channel to Calais. There an abrupt change in transportation awaited him. His machine was suddenly needed elsewhere, to replace one that had cracked up in the service, over in the Middle East, of the afterward-famous Lawrence of Arabia. So Lieutenant Bell now had to transfer to the train to reach his new headquarters at Nancy.

At last he found himself on his first bombing station at the remote village of Rempavillier, a tiny alpine centre buried deep in those picturesque foothills of the greater Alps known as the Vosges mountains.

Setting out after dark from this post, each with a three-man crew and four machine guns, the British planes nightly crossed into Germany. There they located their targets and dumped their loads of sixteen one-hundred-and-twelve pound bombs. This was usually the easier part of the novel chore.

Up then in hot pursuit would zoom the German planes, Fokker D 7's or night-flying scouts, Halberstadts and Friedrichshafens. The great bomb-flying Gothas that were suspiciously almost a replica of the Handley Pages and the British crews in the latter planes would usually leave each other strictly alone.

To escape their enemy pursuers, Bell and his companions often wandered away off course. Twice he piloted a plane that was forced down far from home base.

"Eventually, we always found our way back," he recalled. "Our base had an unique and quite remarkable system of identifying us in the pitch black and helping us down as we returned.

"Each night before we set out, a kind of password was given out, letter of the night, say K. Colours of the night, red and white. Flying in the inky pitch, we might see as we reached the area near

what we believed to be home the flash of beacons below. Hidden in pits were powerful searchlights ready to signal us. If we could furnish the correct code for the night, they'd put out landing lights in the shape of the letter L to enable us to come down."

If the nights were full of dangerous venturing and frequent brushing with death, the days in this small secluded village were quite otherwise.

One pastime there was in which all the young airmen—lads from across the globe, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, Canada, including two French-speaking Canadians, Vipond and Roy—were absorbingly interested. Each afternoon they found their way to a spot on the cobbled street outside the mayor's office. Here on the outside wall were posted bulletins reporting the progress of the war.

At first only one or two phlegmatic natives displayed sufficient curiosity about the course of the war to join the little knot of khaki-clad airmen. Then, as the days passed, more and more of the villagers gathered with them. Eventually there was quite a large crowd of seemingly eager watchers.

With wonderment, Airman Bell noted this ever-increasing group of usually stolid natives. There was an excitement stirring about them that was quite out of harmony with the depressing nature of the bulletins. Among them was a button manufacturer who had once been to New York and who spoke fluent English. More than once he'd had a chat with him.

Finally, he could stand it no longer. He sought out the button-man.

"Can you tell me," he asked him, "why these people come? Why more and more are all at once so interested in the course of the war? What are they so excited about?"

"Why do they come?" The button-man looked about the bright-eyed knot of villagers. "Why? It is quite natural. They have heard about your Vipond and Roy."

"What about them?" After all, this French-Canadian pair of airmen, Vipond and Roy, were decent likeable chaps. There was nothing about them so different as to stir up excitement like this.

"Why, it is simple. They come to hear your Vipond and Roy speak. That is all. Your men, these Canadians, they are speaking the French of two hundred years ago. It is amazing. That is why."

"As if I'd suddenly come face to face with two Englishmen speaking, say, the English of Shakespeare's day. Is that it?"

"Precisely. And the French they are speaking, it is beautiful. It is also the language of the educated of two hundred years ago."

After that Lieutenant Bell too looked with new interest on fellow-flyers Vipond and Roy.

Often off course, and a frequent target of spitting anti-aircraft fire, persistently Jimmy flew a charmed life. He survived two forced landings and time and again he was chased by intercepting Hun planes. On one occasion, his navigator right beside him failed to share this good luck. During a peppering by anti-aircraft fire, the unlucky chap suffered, despite much hasty bobbing up and down from his place in the vulnerable open plane, a painful back wound from enemy shrapnel.

Whereas Pilot Jimmy's good-luck goddess brought him through skin-hole right to the great day of the armistice.

With the cease-fire signalled at last, he was thereafter posted to Squadron 214. This unit's chore was to run rapid lines of communication from Cologne to Brussels and on to Paris and London.

Presently rumour whispered that the squadron was to be refitted for service in India. To Lieutenant Bell, the news was disquieting.

"The permanent air force? India? Not for me, thank you."

Five thousand miles westward in a tiny northern city the possibility of a job awaited him. Not much of a job, perhaps. Not much of a city, either. Not when you compared it with any of dozens of British and European centres he'd seen in the hectic years.

But a city far from the horrible heartache of war, a city possessing some magnetic quality, with its youth and its freshness, its rawness and its freedom, to beckon a young man. And withal a frontier-town with a continent-sized hinterland suggesting enormous possibilities to young airmen who had magnificent visions tucked away back in their sky-riding minds. A frontier-town that was to develop, beyond their most breath-taking dreams, into a kind of new-world air Plymouth, and a new-world air capital of a great northern empire.

A frontier-town in which, as long before as ten years, another young man had, too, glimpsed a grand aerial vision.

## 1909-1918

IT WAS Labour Day in Edmonton in the year 1909. No one had looked forward to the holiday more eagerly than the restless young carpenter, Reginald Hunt. He was ready, at last, to give the small city's celebrating citizens the jolt of their pioneering lives.

Ever since the Wright brothers, almost six years previously, had electrified the world with their first flight of a heavier-than-air machine, the Flyer at Kitty Hawk, down on that North Carolina wasteland, Reginald Hunt had been determined to try his luck here in this buoyant northern air above this infant city.

Three years before, after constant study and planning, he'd made up his mind. He'd build a new kind of glider. With the help and encouragement of his friend and fellow-carpenter, Carruthers, he set to work in his tiny west-end carpenter shop.

The results were not completely satisfying. A glider had too many limitations. Presently he knew what he must add.

"What we've got to find somehow," he told his friend, "is an engine."

Install an engine in his glider, he was convinced, and he too could fly equally as well as the Wright brothers. But where to find a suitable one? He scoured all possible sources, without success. At last he faced the only answer. He himself must build one.

He set to work. Step by step the motor took shape. Finally he had a beauty of an engine which he was sure would do the trick. His machine would fly. As for a propeller, again he hunted about for a model of the type of thing he needed. There once more his sharp creative mind saw what was wanted.

"I based my design for a propellor," he told a curious reporter, "on the fans that keep flies from sleeping in restaurants."

With the help of excited friends and neighbours, Reginald shoved his machine out into a west-end meadow. Under the two flat wings

were bicycle wheels to move it. Under the huge tail assembly were two more small wheels to cushion the rear. Climbing into the box-like contraption, Reg strapped himself into a seat secured between the wings. Behind him was his home-made pusher-type motor.

He started the motor and off he rode.

To the amazement of a crowd of doubting scoffers, up into the air Reg rose easily. Over fields and trees and houses he soared, skimming along sometimes at a height of fifty feet above ground. What was more astounding still, he stayed up there. Turning and twisting as gracefully as any hawk, he sailed about for the long-distance record of thirty-five minutes.

"I'm delighted with the success I've attained," he proudly told the reporter.

After all, it was only six months before that John McCurdy had established a Canadian and Empire record by flying the *Silver Dart* a half mile over the harbour ice at Baddeck Bay in Nova Scotia. Now Reginald Hunt could claim the honour of being the first westerner to fly.

"My plane is constructed on altogether new lines," this first Alberta conqueror of the air announced happily. "I've watched all the scientific magazines and I know that nothing like it has ever been built before."

But alas. The sustained flight had strained his home-built engine. He must locate somewhere, or himself build, a more efficient one.

"With a good motor," he assured his ground-hugging gallery, "I can stay up as long as the gasoline lasts. I can go as high as I like," he added confidently, "and carry two other passengers."

Convinced that his invention would one day reap him a fortune, he hunted about for financial assistance. Far and near he sought aid, even journeying as far as the Pacific coast in a hopeless search for a backer who would invest capital in a plane-building factory. Unsuccessful, during the winter he himself laboured to build another engine. Attempting to fly it at the Exhibition the next summer, it is reported, he crashed into a fence and wrecked his precious machine.

Completely defeated now, and quite destitute of funds, suddenly he washed his hands of more plane-building and headed northward to become a boat-builder for the Hudson's Bay Company.

Perhaps Reginald Hunt's amazing performance did not sow even



a tiny germ of true air-mindedness in Edmonton soil, even though he, apparently, so nearly made the city the Canadian birthplace of aviation.

"I am satisfied that Hunt's machine was a true aeroplane," said Tony Cashman, a local historian who was the first to unearth from old newspaper files the story of Hunt's flying. "A. W. Ormsby, a former city commissioner, remembered Hunt personally as 'a very eccentric chap.'" There was no doubt, Mr. Ormsby told Tony, "that the machine he flew was an aeroplane."

In eastern Canada, in 1910, first air meets were held both in Montreal and Toronto. Here in the west, too, were many who wanted at least to see for themselves this new contraption called an aeroplane flying in the sky. Willingly they would pay out good cash to watch another daredevil like Hunt who would be reckless enough to try his luck rivaling the birds.

Down in those madcap United States were already several young fellows earning their living by doing just that sort of thing. So the enterprising committee of citizens sponsoring the Edmonton Spring Horse Show of 1911 got in touch with a pair of these American lads, by name Hugh Robinson and Bob St. Henry.

Presently, arrangements were all completed. For a nice fat fee, the two bird-men would bring at least one of their amazing machines to Edmonton and fly it at the show.

Then, on the spring afternoon of April 26, over river south from Edmonton, in the tiny twin city of Strathcona, knots of spectators began to gather. Milling excitedly about a large horse-drawn dray, they watched large mysterious-looking crates being loaded on to it.

Crammed into these various crates in assorted bits and pieces, were, the curious crowd was assured, all the parts of a whole aeroplane. Once the dray had transferred them over to the new Exhibition Grounds on the north side of the Saskatchewan, they were to be assembled into the wonder-working machine in which the American eagles, Robinson and St. Henry, would whirl above the heads of patrons of the Spring Show.

Dutifully a reporter hustled over to Strathcona to see what the ruckus was all about. "The powerful little engine was in a case by itself," he told his readers next day. "The planes were carefully covered to prevent damage in transit." The planes of course were the wings of the novel machine.

All sorts of ways in which such a contraption might be put to good use began to occur to the watching crowd.

"They'll be as common as automobiles some day," boldly predicted one onlooker. "It wasn't so very many years ago that the appearance of one of those 'devil wagons,' all crated up at a railway station, would have made more commotion than this flying machine."

These were the boom years in the tiny twin cities, Edmonton and Strathcona. There was not of course too much to sell except real estate, of which there were hundreds of acres lying round about in thick bush and lush prairie. So sell these many folks did, as city lots, at increasingly fantastic prices.

"Buy now," huge two-page advertisements shrieked from the dailies, the *Bulletin*, the *Capital* and the *Journal*. "Bargains in city lots,—street cars within one-half mile; water, sewer, phone, churches, hotel, stores, within one-quarter mile."

One real estate salesman, whose weary legs and feet had often bucked oozing mud and clinging clay, looked at these queer crates being hoisted onto the dray and beamed.

"Wouldn't it be a great thing to take people out to see subdivision property? The automobile wouldn't be in it," he chuckled, "with a new little two-passenger biplane."

Through Strathcona the horses began to drag the oddly-laden dray. Then down the long riverbank hill to the Low Level Bridge they plodded.

"Steady now," their driver cautioned them. "Whoa back," he shouted as he kept an extra-tight grip on the reins. There must be no upsetting of the dray and its delicate freight.

"Gee there. Gee," he commanded when they had safely crossed to the north side of the river. Now he headed them eastward for the mile-long drive to the new Exhibition Grounds.

Caution slowed his progress. So did the many curious folk along the way, who hurled all manner of questions at him.

"Whoa," he would stop the horses as spectators rushed up to get a good look at the wooden crates containing the marvellous machine.

"Is that the flying machine?" they shouted at him.

"Where are the wings and the tail?"

"Whoa there," the patient teamster called again to his fidgeting horses, who weren't the least impressed by the novel freight they were pulling.

"Why doesn't the birdman fly over to Edmonton and save the cost of the transfer?" suggested a thrifty soul. Already it had been rumoured some one was going to dare one of the sky riders to fly back all the way across the wide-banked Saskatchewan River from Edmonton to Strathcona.

An exasperated automobile owner was apparently quite ready now to adopt this newest method of locomotion.

"That machine looks like the only solution to tire troubles and the dust nuisance," he sighed, drawing up his machine to the curb to watch the dray pass. "I honestly believe the workingman's automobile has come at last."

By Friday, April 28, eager newspaper readers were assured that the big treat of their lives was at last ready for them.

"The machine is here," a report announced. "At three o'clock this afternoon Edmontonians will witness the first flight in this city of an arrangement made by hand." The writer had forgotten all about the ingenious Reginald Hunt, first local man to fly, and his first locally built aeroplane.

"The aeroplane arrived in the city Wednesday," the report went on. "Yesterday morning the aviators were busy preparing it for the dangerous trip. Only a few witnessed the last proceedings at the Exhibition Grounds yesterday. They were very curious to know just where the passenger will be seated."

Rumour had it that the machine would take up patrons wishing to fly.

A chair was in place for the aviator, the news story continued. But there was no other provision for seating accommodation in the machine. A prominent hotel man who was anxious to make the flight persisted in his inquiry as to where a passenger would be placed.

"Right here," another spectator guessed.

"It's in a place where the passenger will have to be strapped tight if he wants to stay with the machine at all while in the air," the head-shaking reporter noted. However, that did not discourage the hotel-keeper.

"I would go if you put me on the engine," he insisted.

He expressed a desire to go as far towards heaven as he could. There are many more, the sceptical reporter added, who seem very

anxious to make the trip, although it is thought that at the critical moment many would back out.

That Friday afternoon, as the reader may guess, Hugh Robinson was very much alone as he ventured up into the air and over the heads of the open-mouthed spectators.

Next day, Saturday, crowds of citizens gathered to watch him again make his aerial journeys over the Exhibition Grounds. St. Henry's plane, report said, had failed to arrive, so the second daredevil, Bob St. Henry, lent moral support only to the demonstrations.

"The trips were made in the air," the *Edmonton Journal* assured doubting readers. "As the aviator alighted after each, he was loudly applauded by the vast multitude.

"Previous to his starting on his dangerous journey, Mr. Robinson remained at the side of the machine for over an hour watching his men get it in excellent shape. Finally the propeller started working. With a rush, a whirr, it commenced to move rapidly around, making 1500 revolutions a minute. Spectators standing nearby were nearly knocked over by the force of the wind coming from the propeller and several hats were blown off."

At last all was ready. The machine was wheeled to the centre of the grass oval enclosed by the racetrack. It skimmed along the ground, then rose gracefully into the air until it reached a height of four hundred feet.

After circling the field three times, Robinson alighted without mishap.

Once again he soared up into the sky, to fulfil the promise of the advertisements in the Edmonton newspapers: "A sensational and scientific exhibition of flying in the Curtiss biplane, fastest in the world. Exposition Grounds, Friday and Saturday at three o'clock p.m. Tickets, one dollar."

Citizens of all nationalities, including a number of Indians, gaped at and applauded each flying feat. In addition to the seven hundred who on Saturday paid the admission into the grounds, outside the enclosure half as many again climbed telegraph poles, poplar trees, and boxcars to get a free view.

In spite of this cheapskating, those in charge were able to scrape together enough money to fulfil their contract with Sky-rider Robinson. He was thoroughly satisfied that this first venture up into unknown northern Canada had turned out so well.

"I was paid \$600 for each flight," he told Calgary's flying pioneer Frank Ellis afterward. "In all I got \$3000 for five chances to break my neck."

Next day, Sunday, the twin cities on the North Saskatchewan were thronging with sky-gazing expectant men, women and children. It had been announced that, to fulfil a wager, Robinson would dare to fly his plane across the high wide river banks to a specified lot in Strathcona.

All afternoon and into the evening, the crowds watched and waited. On Monday, the *Journal* came out with a news story that had for its first paragraph a single word: "Stung!"

While the Sunday crowds waited through the long hours, the story then continued, the well-pleased young aviators were speeding southward by pullman car, entrained for the American cities with which their next contracts were made.

"Snugly curled up in one corner of an express car" of the same train, reported the *Journal*, was the flying machine.

St. Henry, a former actor happily nicknamed "Lucky Bob," was bound for Wichita, Kansas, to which city his plane had been sent, in error, instead of to Edmonton. This was the reason, it was explained, for his failure to do any flying in the Alberta capital. Meanwhile Robinson was to bedevil fate next in the city of Washington.

It wasn't cowardice, their manager insisted. They just could not stay on, he apologized, to fly across the broad Saskatchewan that Sunday afternoon. Had they done so, they would have been late for their next commitments.

Meanwhile, through Sunday afternoon and evening, the hopeful sky-staring watchers lingered, on the hillsides, on vacant lots, even on hotel roofs. Impatiently they waited for this latest miracle of science to cross the mighty river that had for so long been the region's great and only artery of commerce.

"There it is," someone would cry excitedly.

But the smudge in the sky was only a cloud.

"Mama, I want to see the whirlwind," pleaded a little lad whose mother was trying to coax him homeward.

All this only ten years before two young Edmonton pilots were to risk their necks flying a thousand miles farther north over areas hitherto unseen by white men.

It wasn't too long, however, before that little boy, now a half-grown lad, and those frustrated sky-gazing crowds were to forget their being "stung" that tedious Sunday afternoon. It wasn't too long before they were to thrill to the bedazzling aeronautics of a fellow-countrywoman of pioneer barnstormers Robinson and St. Henry.

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It was the dark war year of 1916. Over in Europe, Engineer Jimmy Bell was learning the rudiments of navigation in the new medium. In the fearful moil of trench warfare, Edmonton lads were learning to endure and suffer and die. Those left behind were learning how to keep, at all costs, the home fires burning.

In Edmonton the summer fair must go on, and it must be successful. The sum of \$1600 had been allotted to the special drawing card feature, a nightly display of brilliant fireworks. At this point the government stepped in.

"Sorry," came the official word. "No gunpowder, in this time of pressing war need, can be spared for fireworks."

Members of the Exhibition Board scratched their heads and looked about in desperation. Some sort of highlighting attraction they must procure for their show.

"Had they heard," some one suggested with a flash of inspiration, "of the daring young American aviatrix, Katherine Stinson?"

Investigation brought the happy answer. In payment of that \$1600, Katherine Stinson would ship her marvellous Curtiss biplane to Edmonton and do sensational flights daily at the exhibition. En route she would stop off at Calgary, in southern Alberta, to outshine at the fair there the great prewar Stampede feats of the western cowboys.

To herald Miss Stinson's approaching visit, glowing reports of the skill and courage of this amazing young woman were reproduced in the local newspapers.

Fifty thousand people, one dispatch told Edmontonians, had recently crowded the Sheepshead Bay Speedway in New York to watch as "her aerial flights reached the limit of daring" above the gasping multitude.

"Twisting, spiralling, now upside down in a breathless loop, now hurtling downward," a reprinted account from the *New York Sun* went on admiringly, "for a thousand feet of sheer drop that seemed



certain suicide, only to bring up in a graceful volplane to her landing place on the in-field, that was Katherine Stinson at the Sheepshead Bay aviation tournament."

Every report bore the same theme. Wherever she did her looping and swooping and diving and somersaulting, she thrilled thronging thousands with her feats. And all this was only three years after male Aviator Lincoln Beachey had looped North America's first aeroplane loop at San Diego in California.

When the astounding lassie arrived smilingly in Edmonton on the pleasant summer morning of July 10, 1916, she announced to awe-struck reporters, "Flying is perfectly safe so long as you keep your head."

This slim bit of a twenty-year-old girl, who weighed in at only one hundred and five pounds, had, they discovered, learned to fly in her native city of San Antonio, Texas, just four years before. Meanwhile, in between barnstorming contracts, with her brother and her sister she had conducted an aviation school in San Antonio. Already sixty Canadians, anxious to do their bit flying "over there," had trained with them.

"Canadian men make splendid flyers," she told a reporter, who must have proudly squared his shoulders as she went on,

"They are so strong, so physically fit, and they have an object in view. They take their flying seriously. They are different from the American men. With them it is more of a fad, and they take it lightly."

Gladly she had offered her services to the British Flying Corps, she said, but that organization spurned any but British subjects.

Doubtless a bit more emboldened himself by now, the reporter took a moment to reassure too his Edmonton and district readers.

"If you feel a little nervous when you see Miss Stinson and her biplane soar high into the heavens, remember this. The higher up she goes, the safer she is, since if anything goes wrong with her engine, as happened in Calgary where the altitude affected it, it is a simple matter to plane to the ground and get a good landing, while if the aeroplane has attained only a few hundred feet, it has so much shorter distance to plane that there is no chance of a landing-place."

Luckily, in Edmonton on this first visit, all went exceedingly well.

Each afternoon and evening, the sensational miss gave Exhibition crowds the thrill of their lives. She displayed her full box of tricks, steep turns, spirals, dives, loops and plummetings. On one afternoon





Katherine Stinson hands the first air-mail in Western Canada to Postmaster Armstrong at the Edmonton Exhibition Grounds. Centre: Manager Stark.  
The Curtiss Jenny *Edmonton* being viewed at the Edmonton Exhibition Grounds.



The four pioneering planes of General Mitchell's first Alaska expedition resting at the May-Gorman Airfield in Edmonton.

Wop May with the huge Junkers monoplane, the *Vic*, with which the Imperial Oil Company initiated a flying service to the Fort Norman discovery well.

Warden Ponsford permitted penitentiary prisoners out into the yard and Katherine soared low over and around the grounds to permit them, too, to see the wonder-working maid and machine.

Again the following year, Katherine was to star the show at the Edmonton midsummer fair. So popular were her amazing performances that, if they did not promote air-mindedness, at least they indicated to many how the World War was giving a tremendous impetus to air conquest.

She was now festooned with fresh laurels and gold medals from the land of the cherry blossom. Quite recently she had returned from a triumphant tour of Japan. Still more recently, she had flown, as a publicity stunt to swell the Red Cross war fund, a gruelling four-hundred-mile flight from New York to Washington.

Here in Edmonton, too, her flights were to be attuned to the bitter conflict that was still draining Canada and her allies of men and resources. An "enemy" trench was dug in the grassy turf before the grandstand. First she was to perform startling aerial evolutions to illustrate the kind of flying done over the war zones. Then, into the trench, she was to drop mock bombs smack upon the luckless "enemy."

Alack! It was upon the dainty dauntless Katherine, who arrived once more all curls and smiles, that the bad luck descended during that summer of 1917.

All the opening Monday afternoon, the crowd watched and waited for the promised flight by the great bird woman. Unforeseen difficulties in setting up and preparing her plane had developed. The machine, it turned out, was not the one she had flown the previous week at the Calgary fair. That plane had suffered damage in the southern city, and this second one had been sent on to her from Chicago as an emergency "spare."

Finally, at supper time, Katherine prepared for a trial spin. All was supposed to have been put in readiness. Still the engine failed to perform properly for the thwarted aviatrix.

There was more hurried fixing and adjusting by the harrassed mechanics. At last, at nine o'clock that evening, the determined young lady climbed into the cockpit to make another try. The throng in the grandstand and about the infield, alerted by the announcer, anxiously held their breath.

All went well during the preliminary run over the turf. Then up, up the small biplane rose to about twenty feet above the western end of the racetrack. Suddenly it swerved, turned partly over, and crashed to the ground.

For an instant the spectators sat petrified. All at once, as one body, they jumped to their feet and began to rush to the young pilot's aid.

Unscathed, the plucky birdgirl clambered out of the cockpit.

"I'm not hurt a bit," she assured the crowd. "I'm so sorry it happened."

A corner of one wing and both running wheels had been torn from the balky machine.

"This is the first time I've attempted to fly this plane. The control lever's much too stiff for me to handle," she fumed. "I had to land in a hurry and I didn't want to fly into the grandstand."

Hastily she wired to Calgary for another machine. The jinx was still right on her heels. The next train brought a plane, another which she had not previously flown.

Again she wired Calgary. "This isn't the machine I sent for," she exploded. "I can't fly this plane."

She was a girl to keep her word. She had contracted to fly at the Edmonton fair and fly she would. So she directed her men to continue with repairs and adjustments to the first machine on hand. Frantically they applied themselves to the job of making the damaged plane airworthy again, with the little mistress always right on the spot to encourage and supervise.

By six o'clock on Thursday, plane and aviatrix were ready again for a preliminary try-out. This time, all went well. A little more adjusting remained to be done, and by nine that evening Katherine was ready to fulfill her contract with the long-patient fairgoers.

High in the clear air she rose without hesitation. Eighteen thousand hearts rose with her to eighteen thousand throats. For an instant the plane seemed to waver and imaginations spelled out the word "doom" in the quiet sky.

At once she began her programme of dazzling gymnastics. With unflinching skill she demonstrated the many kinds of aerial manoeuvring being done in the dangerous dogfights over European battle-grounds.

Then, with special signalling apparatus, high in the heavens she began to describe filmy smoke figures. Instead of what the nervous

had seen written, swiftly she spelled out the letter S. The tense watching thousands relaxed a little now as the figures hung like silver gossamer in the peaceful evening sky.

Next, as Jimmy Bell and the others were doing nightly "over there," she dropped a bomb. It plummeted down, missing the mock trench completely.

During the Friday performance, she tried again. Fair and square the dummy bomb landed in the enemy trench. Now Edmontonians had sampled the full horror of airborne warfare.

That mysterious jinx still travelled with the plucky pilot. Leaving Edmonton the next day, Saturday, she discovered that the half-dozen gold medals bestowed upon her by various bedazzled Nipponese in the course of her spring tour were missing from her luggage.

No wonder she announced, as she quitted the city, that she was through with barnstorming.

"I'm going to devote all my time now," she said, "to training flyers for war service."

Next summer's fair was to feature, as its stellar attraction, the celebrated balloonist, Lucille Belmont. Daily this young woman would parachute from her giant balloon down before the grandstand audience. Then to a delighted exhibition board came word of a further treat in store. The conscientious little Katherine wrote to announce that she, too, was coming to the fair.

This time, of course, she had no contract. She had been haunted, it seemed, by the memory of the flying fiasco of the previous summer.

"I'm coming on my own," she wrote, "to atone for the unsatisfactory performances of last year."

At once the jubilant committee set to work to arrange for a new kind of aerial history to be made in the west. Manager Stark of the Exhibition Board arranged with Postmaster-General P. E. Blondin at Ottawa for Miss Stinson's appointment as official mail-carrier. In Calgary she was to be handed a sack of mail, picked higgledy-piggledy from that day's first-class letters. These she would bring by aeroplane to Edmonton.

Again, the young woman charmed Calgarians with her flying performances. The mail was assembled, duly stamped "Aeroplane Mail Service, July 9, 1918," and handed to her.

To find her way to the small sprawling city of Edmonton, by this time united with Strathcona to form one "metropolis", she was to follow the steel ribbon of the Calgary and Edmonton railway. This rail line ran almost two hundred miles due north, closely paralleling the celebrated old trail.

Over that trail not too many years before, whip-waving bull-whackers had plodded with the creeping ox-trains plying between Fort Benton in Montana, to Fort Macleod in Alberta, then to Calgary and on to Edmonton, the rich northern fur terminus that was some two to three months' journeying from the southern tip of the road.

Now this modern miss was to pioneer the air route to Edmonton. Her progress was to be a triumphal aerial tour from whistle stop to tiny village to straggling town.

Special arrangements were hurriedly made with the Canadian Pacific, then owners of the rail line, to have a watcher at each station along the route telegraph the joyful word on to Edmonton the moment maid and machine passed overhead.

At half past one on the afternoon of the ninth, Postmaster King of Calgary handed her the mail-sack, and up she rose with swanlike ease from that city's racetrack.

There was not a hint of difficulty as she soared northward and out of sight, alone in the Curtiss military-type biplane. Her mechanics were scheduled to follow by automobile.

Seven miles out of Calgary, the Curtiss engine began to sulk. Down upon the dwarf buffalo wool of a prairie meadow Katherine was forced to descend. She landed without mishap and hiked over to the nearby tiny flagstop of Beddington.

How to locate and quickly get word to her mechanics posed something of a problem. Finally she was able to reach Calgary Stampede Manager E. L. Richardson, who in turn passed on to her men the particulars of her predicament and location.

At last, help arrived. All that long summer afternoon, as excited fairgoers in Edmonton kept scanning the southern sky, the mechanics sweated over the balky machine stranded on the bald prairie nearly two hundred miles away.

It was almost supertime when the plane was restored to topnotch running order. Determined as ever to do things absolutely right, Katherine climbed into the cockpit and headed back to Calgary. She wanted an unblemished record for this first flight of an aeroplane from Calgary to Edmonton.



Leaving the southern city again at two minutes to six, once more she headed northward. Following the rail lines and also using map and compass as guides, this time she made perfect progress.

High above Airdrie, Carstairs, Olds, Innisfail, she soared, on and on into the north. Below, men, women and children, alerted to watch for her, spilled from their homes to get a glimpse of their first aeroplane and a preview peek into a new age. Proudly they shared the privilege of waving to the world-celebrated pilot as she looked down upon them. Spellbound, they stood watching her vanish to a pinpoint in the northern sky.

At each station telegraph keys tapped out word of the miracle passing overhead. Before the Edmonton grandstand, each amazing message was read to the waiting thousands who had craned their necks southward so many times during the long afternoon and early evening. Anxiously they followed the flight as terse bulletins arrived from Red Deer, Lacombe, Ponoka, Wetaskiwin.

Expectation began to reach fever pitch. At last came the great news wired from Leduc, the sleepy village only twenty-eight miles distant that was so often the butt of urban Edmonton wit. Now somnolent Leduc, that thirty years later was to awaken to continent-wide oil fame, swelled momentarily to a new stature as all eyes strained toward the south.

"In the bright lexicon of youth, there's no such word as fail," summed up an Edmonton reporter as he related how the renowned young woman had, that day, overcome handicaps that would have deterred almost any aviator from making the trip.

"Flying as true as an arrow," he wrote, "the bird-like figure hove into sight from the south."

"Here she comes," chorused a thousand vibrant voices.

Circling low, at three minutes past eight Katherine came down to make a faultless landing on the infield before the grandstand at Edmonton.

Manager Stark of the Exhibition Board and Postmaster Armstrong galloped out to meet her. Radiant with triumphant smiles, she handed the sack of mail to Mr. Armstrong.

From the packed grandstand and the crowded edge of the infield, a deafening roar rose to hail her. Then there was a rush, and within minutes the swarming spectators had pushed past the police cordon to surround girl and plane.



Wearing helmet, goggles, oilskin coat and always the heart-warming smile, the young lady stepped from her plane. Every clap and shout, every tribute, were well earned.

"The gamest little girl in the world" had chalked a double record for herself.

Old-timers present that night did a lot of computing and comparing.

By oxcart the journey from Calgary to Edmonton had dragged into weeks. By stagecoach or buggy or cutter it could comfortably be done, with the old trail at its best, within a fortnight. Lately, by automobile, it often still took two whole bone-shaking days.

"Fancy. All that way in two hours, five minutes. Simply unbelievable." The oldsters wanted to prick themselves to make sure they weren't dreaming. This little Miss Stinson was some girl.

Then there was that matter of the mail. Hers was the first official air mail flight in western Canada. It was, in fact, the second in all Canada, the first having been made only a fortnight before, when Captain Brian Peck flew a sack of mail from Montreal to Toronto.

That week another near-mishap came close to writing the finale to the dazzling damsel's aerial achievements. Coming into land during her last-night flight at the fair grounds, she overshot the fence and bounced her wheels off the roof of a parked car. Bumpety-bumping on the field, at length she contrived to bring her machine to a full stop. Miraculously, again she stepped unhurt from a this-time undamaged plane.

In after years, many a fear-choked spectator of those dizzying days and near-tragic nights at Edmonton's 1917 and 1918 summer fairs, drew a deep sigh of relief to learn that at last the great bird woman, Katherine Stinson, had happily married and was quietly settled down to nest on a bit of solid ground in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

A thoroughly novel kind of summer fair mishap provided a remarkable attraction at Edmonton's next exhibition. It, too, in its way achieved a new record in aerial history in western Canada and very likely for all the world.

This next exhibition was also to demonstrate a native brand of air skill and courage that seemed to become a part of the very atmosphere of the place and that were to give an earnest of astounding events to be shaped out of the future.

## 1919

IT WAS NEAR the dying hour of Calgary's gala fair week in 1919. The final Saturday afternoon auto races had attracted a large crowd. But over in the midway things were pretty quiet and there wasn't a soul riding the big merry-go-round.

About to give some young passengers their first aerial thrill, Captain Freddie McCall, one of Canada's most decorated war aces, was suddenly in difficulty over the racetrack. Overseas he had downed thirty-seven enemy planes and displayed the kind of prowess which entitled him to wear the Military Cross with bar and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Now this remarkable battle record suggested the presence of mind he instantly displayed.

The big new ten-thousand-dollar Jenny was plunging directly toward the thronging race fans. Almost brushing off their hats as he swerved above them, quickly McCall manoeuvred the lumbering machine over to the midway.

Fair and square he contrived to bring her down, right on top of the big merry-go-round.

The Jenny, of course, was badly damaged. But passengers and pilot scrambled out unhurt. The merry-go-round, too, got off scot free. Within minutes, a gaping excited crowd closed in around this most novel of midway attractions.

An aeroplane spiralling and looping in and out as it zoomed in the rightful domain only of the birds was, in those days, a sight easily worth two bits of any man's money. An aeroplane perched atop a large merry-go-round was a new eighth wonder in the world. So Captain McCall, or maybe his equally resourceful assistant, Captain Wop May, conceived a brilliant plan to capitalize on the Jenny's misfortune.

By this first postwar midsummer of 1919, a number of restless discharged young airmen, like Lieutenant Jimmy Bell, had begun to cast desperately about for employment. Especially did some of them

want to make a living from the air, the medium into which war had fortuitously raised them and in which they had so precariously acquired a dearly-won skill and knowledge.

Their living, so scoffers warned them, would be largely on that medium. But a few were not to be deterred by this disheartening forecast.

Already one youthful Edmonton pilot, Captain Wilfred "Wop" May, had hurried to establish a brand-new commercial enterprise in his home city.

"Sure. We can make money," he persuaded his brother Court.

Together they dreamed and schemed how to take the daring new step, to shape and organize an aeroplane company that would be a profit-yielding corporation.

Wop was a quiet blonde lad who brushed off with a shrug any comment on his amazing exploits overseas. There he had proved himself to be one of the most intrepid of the young Canadians fighting with the Royal Air Force.

In his first combat action on the western front, he had been pursued by the Great Red Knight, Baron Richtofen. Wop's former schoolmate, his squadron leader Roy Brown, had come to his assistance and shot down this most feared enemy airman of World War One.

Afterward it was rumoured that May's flight had been a deliberate ruse to draw the enemy ace down from his favourite position high above the clouds from where, day after day, he pounced upon luckless victims below.

Now a seasoned ace himself, decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross and with thirteen enemy planes to his credit, Wop came home to Edmonton to find himself a justly celebrated hero.

What did he want most to do, with all phases of the great armed conflict happily over? There was only one answer, and only one word needed for that answer. "Fly."

Already Edmonton had a plane of its very own. During the war citizens had subscribed generously to a fund enabling the Royal Air Force to buy more of the training planes so urgently needed. So, as a token of grateful thanks, one of these machines, a Curtiss JN4 or "Jenny," had been christened *Edmonton*.

The world-wrenching war over, a Montreal business man who had successfully promoted real estate in Edmonton's west end, James

Carruthers, hit upon a generous gesture of repayment to the struggling city. Straightway he got a letter off to the civic authorities.

Would Edmonton, he offered, care to receive her aeroplane namesake as a gift? Could "proper care" be taken of such a gift?

Late in 1918, Edmonton city council pondered the matter. The machine, they decided, could be stowed safely away in the Manufacturers' building on the Exhibition Grounds. Gratefully, the offer was accepted.

Duly, letters and telegrams were exchanged, donor Carruthers purchased the *Jenny Edmonton*, and on January 3rd of 1919 had her shipped as a gift, with his compliments, way out west to Alberta's capital.

Presently, civic representatives took delivery of this largest museum-piece ever donated to the remote city on the North Saskatchewan. Into the sprawling Manufacturers' Building they tucked her safely away.

Aeroplanes, however, were built to be flown. So Wop May, the illustrious local hero, was harkened to with favour when he requested permission to use the pensioned-off plane.

Meeting on May 12 of 1919, city council authorized a contract whereby the young flier could take over the *Jenny* upon deposit of a bond that would guarantee her replacement should she be "damaged by accident or be demolished." A rental fee of \$25 per month was fixed and another stipulation was the "promotion of the principle of flying in and around Edmonton."

Aerial enthusiasm was mounting high and air-mindedness appeared to be mushrooming that spring of 1919. Shrewd exhibition boards saw in the gallant and glamorous young war airmen a major drawing-card easily equal to the great Stinson. Cities and towns began vying with each other to arrange, for their summer fairs, sky exhibits of spinning nose dives, stalls and loops and immelman turns and even aerial combat.

Early in April, Wop and Court May attended a meeting, held at Edmonton, of western Canada fair managers. They suggested a contract to perform stunting flights and passenger-carrying at the summer exhibitions. Also present with a proposition to sell was Gale Brooks of Minneapolis. He urged the managers to allow him to bring in Curtiss machines from across the line.

Finally, a happy compromise was arranged.

"Yes," stipulated the exhibition managers. "Mr. Brooks could bring in new Curtiss machines, provided Captain May of Edmonton and Captain McCall of Calgary be given a chance to qualify to fly them and be hired as pilots."

Arrangements being satisfactorily shaped, Wop pressed forward with his own private air dream.

Just within the city's northwestern limits on the old St. Albert trail, and not far from the rail line Jimmy Bell had helped to build seven years before, Wop spotted a good level bit of pasture that was relatively ideal for an aeroplane. With farmer-owner Walter Sporle he made the necessary leasing arrangements and prepared to have a rough shed erected as hangar.

Meanwhile another young airman still anxious to fly had found his way back to Edmonton after having been released from a German prison camp.

Though he had been forced down and captured in the horrible holocaust that was the Battle of Amiens, in which the British lost one hundred and fifty planes, Lieutenant George Gorman was eager as ever for a life in the air. So the May brothers hired him as pilot.

Back from duties in the Royal Flying Corps was the slightly-built engine-fitter, Pete Derbyshire. Previously Pete had been employed in the senior May's garage and now he agreed to serve as mechanic with the embryo air company.

Out from her resting-place in the Manufacturers' Building the Jenny *Edmonton* was hauled. Over to the infield that had served so many times as a hopping-off spot for Airwoman Stinson she was dragged. There Pete, assisted by Bill Freeze, who had been a rigger in the Royal Flying Corps, proceeded to whip her once more into first-class flying shape.

Next Gorman spun her smoothly along the turf and lifted her easily and expertly into the sky. He circled the city to give the two Edmonton's a first quick look at each other. Cautiously then he brought her down on Walter Sporle's pasture.

Bolstered by the financial assistance of loyal friends, the young May brothers were now all ready to launch their novel project, Edmonton's first aeroplane company.

"Commercial aviation on a big scale will be carried out by well-known city business men," blazed the startling headline in a local newspaper of May 17, 1919.

"We are going into commercial aviation from every standpoint," confidently announced Court May. "We have several machines ordered. They should be here by July first, at which time we'll be commencing operations."

Brother Wop, he disclosed, had a private contract to fly with American machines at the larger Circuit A western fairs. The new local company had secured a contract to fly the B Circuit fairs, with Lieutenant Gorman piloting the *Edmonton*.

"Photography and aerial map-making will be one of the main objects of the company," he added. "We have also secured the agency for a reliable make of plane which should retail in Edmonton at \$3000."

Verifying the validity of the brand-new enterprise, one of the very first in all Canada, in the *Alberta Gazette* of May 19 occurred the following announcement:

I hereby certify that the May Airplanes Limited is this day incorporated under the ordinance of the North West Territories respecting companies and that the company is limited. Capital, \$20,000. Head office, Edmonton.

Given under my hand and seal at Edmonton, this 19th day of May, 1919. E. Trowbridge, registrar of companies.

To demonstrate to doubting Thomases how the aeroplane would save their business ventures both time and money, the infant company contracted with the *Edmonton Journal* to carry the noon editions of Saturday, June 7, to the forty-mile-distant city of Wetaskiwin.

From the eight-storey Tegler building where the papers had just been pulled hot from the presses, Circulation-Manager Harry Fuller rushed two bulging bags of them out to the Walter Sporle farm on the St. Albert trail. There the *Edmonton*, all groomed for the ordeal by Lieutenant Gorman and Mechanic Derbyshire, awaited them.

Quickly the sacks were heaved aboard. Derbyshire climbed in behind Gorman. Publisher M. R. Jennings of the *Journal* shook hands with the pilot and wished him luck. Then off they bowled over the pasture.

Rising readily in spite of her heavy load, which comprised full gas tank, seventy-five pounds of newspapers and the two men, the *Edmonton* swung west to avoid the city. Once past the boundaries of the metropolis, she headed southeastward until she reached that

earth-hugging lodestar, the rail-line leading to Calgary that had guided Katherine Stinson safely to the city the previous summer.

Behind the *Edmonton* as she followed the railway south, a thirty-mile wind was blowing from the northwest.

"The old bus practically ran herself," Pilot Gorman recalled afterward, "the only care I had to take being to head her slightly toward the southwest occasionally to counteract the west drift of the wind."

Soon they were roaring five hundred feet above the scattered buildings at the Ellerslie siding. Straddling the rail tracks, they hurtled on. Presently they found themselves above tiny Leduc, twenty-eight miles distant from Edmonton. Here they dropped great handfuls of leaflets publicizing their trip.

"The old bus roared on," Gorman reported. "Never did the engine run more smoothly."

Next they floated above the quiet hamlet of Millet, which they showered with more leaflets.

Minutes later the "hills of peace," the Cree Indian name for Wetaskiwin, slanted a gentle green beneath them. At the fair grounds of the small city a large crowd, impatient and unpeaceful, awaited their arrival. Out on the racetrack stood a brave solitary figure, obviously the *Journal's* Wetaskiwin representative, ready at his post to receive the papers.

As the plane dropped down to fifty feet above the waiting salesman, Derbyshire flung out the first bag of freight. The Jenny rose, circled, and swooped again. Over the side the mechanic toppled the second sack.

Thus having fulfilled the contract, Gorman lifted the *Edmonton* high a second time, swung her into the wind and set his course homeward. Unbelievably, in the short space of thirty minutes, the mission had been completed.

By this time a regular gale had sprung up, blowing, at the thousand-foot level, at forty-five miles an hour. So Gorman brought the poor labouring machine down to five hundred feet above the double line of steel. As they neared South Edmonton, the fierce wind armed itself with pelting rain. This lashed their faces, that were quite unprotected in the open cockpit, with the burning twang of a rawhide whip.

"The old bus bucked bravely into it," Pilot Gorman recounted. "But practically all we were doing was hovering over the one spot. We were almost standing still."

There was nothing for it but to come down.

"Look out for a likely spot," he shouted to Derbyshire.



Through the driving rain the mechanic's eyes strained down over the cockpit side.

"There's the place for us," he shouted back.

"I followed the direction of his arm," chuckled Gorman. "He was pointing straight at a cemetery."

They contrived, however, to get safely down in a field.

As soon as the worst of the storm had whirled past, they resumed the journey. On the roof of the skyscraping Tegler building, an anxious crowd had collected.

Over the city the going was still as "bumpy as a row-boat in a choppy sea." But to demonstrate the kind of stuff of which the *Edmonton* and pilot and mechanic were made, they struggled triumphantly over buildings and crowds and showered down more leaflets that testified now to a mission successfully concluded. Then, in a continued spirit of bravado, the Jenny descended to do contour hopping over treetops and freight cars as she frisked off north-westerly to her berth by the St. Albert trail.

Thus ended successfully the first commercial flight in western Canada. Once again aerial history had been accomplished in Edmonton.

Not to be bested by this publicity stunt staged by its newspaper rival, later in the month, on the nineteenth, the *Edmonton Bulletin* arranged for a "drop."

Out on the picturesque wooded slopes above the Sturgeon River at St. Albert, near the old mission planted by Black-robe Voyageur Lacombe, two thousand people were that day gathered for the giant picnic of the Ray local of the United Farmers of Alberta. Over them Lieutenant Gorman was to shower free news copies hot from the *Bulletin* presses.

"The *Edmonton*, a good bus with Lieutenant Gorman at the steering gear," the city's oldest newspaper, the *Bulletin*, proudly attested, "attended the picnic of the Ray local. Unfortunately, there was no suitable landing place near the picnic grounds."

To the background music of the droning aeroplane, appointed speakers reviewed the picnickers' pioneer struggles when, as late as only ten years before, the ox and the horse had been their only mode of transportation. By way of forceful salute from the newest age being ushered in, Gorman peppered them with papers.

Then he soared off to the May aerodrome to await those of the holidayers who had scraped together the necessary twenty dollars and who wanted to put to the test this very latest travel method.

"Already thirty-five passengers have ridden in the *Edmonton*," announced the *Bulletin* as it went on to publish a progress report of the achievements of this first commercial flying company.

"The plane has gone up to 3500 feet," it concluded happily, "the highest yet in western Canada."

With the beginning of July came the summer fair season that was to put solid financial ground under the young air company. So, while Wop May went off to Calgary to help Captain Freddie McCall stage a dazzling aerial show during Stampede week there, George Gorman and his mechanic, Pete Derbyshire, set about barnstorming in the *Edmonton*.

Then it was that the dramatic and near-tragic accident happened to Captain McCall's plane when he set it down so neatly that Saturday afternoon on top of the merry-go-round. Perhaps it was Wop, who, scheduled to be a stellar attraction at Edmonton's fair the following week, thought up the next move.

"Why not ship the wrecked plane to Edmonton, and display it at the fair there?"

"Splendid idea. We'll enclose it all with canvas and charge fifty cents admission to all those wishing to examine it. It'll prove a sure-fire attraction."

They were right. Many of the fair-goers had read avidly and plentifully about shot-down twisted planes plummeting earthward over the European war zones. They had pored over pictures and gasped at movies portraying awful aerial disasters. Never had they had the opportunity to see, right before their own eyes, a wrecked plane, or to touch with their own hands its splintered wood and distorted metal.

"A most unique attraction," redundantly pointed out a news-writer describing in the *Edmonton Journal* this remarkable drawing-card.

"An exhibit of great educational value," he wrote happily on. "Metal and wood are twisted, bent and broken," this being "the most unusual plane accident on record. Such an opportunity to look so

intimately into the inner workings of an aeroplane is not afforded even at the Curtiss factory, where the construction of all machines is kept secret."

Tooted as the Big Victory Fair, this first postwar Edmonton Exhibition of 1919 had been preceded by weeks of bustling preparation. All areas and buildings that had during the war been temporarily set aside for the use of the militia were now restored to their former purpose. Gangs of men had been busily re-splashing all buildings a glistening white, banging together several new ones, grooming grass and shade trees, laying out fresh walks and generally polishing up for the greatest celebration the city had yet known.

For special attractions, the famous auto speed-racers Jules Ellingboe and Wild Bill Endicott were to share the spotlight with flyers May and Gorman.

"Which is faster, aeroplane or auto?" was the teasing question posed for opening night.

To roar out a dramatic answer, an air and earth championship race was to be "run" between Gorman in the *Edmonton* and Ellingboe in his racing car. Unfortunately, a dark horse won, a stiff wind that blew up so furiously that Gorman was unable to take off.

Into the tent all that week streamed the men and boys who snatched at the opportunity to examine minutely the fallen Jenny shipped from Calgary. Then they rushed out whenever it was announced that Wop May and George Gorman were about to perform more death-defying manoeuvres.

High in the heavens the pair began stunting. At a height of some three thousand feet, gaily they played tag with each other. Light-heartedly they pulled their machines over backward, into single and double and even triple loops.

"Wowh!" barked the small boys, their eyes popping.

"Whewhh!" sighed the young girls, their eyes dewy.

To cap the climax, Wop pulled the nose of his machine straight up in the air, stalled the engine, and began to tumble earthward.

"Look. The Falling Leaf. Some show!" ejaculated the men.

Now on one wing tip, now on the other, tail first, head first, right side up, upside down, Wop let his machine plummet down.

"Oohh! Oohh!" screamed the ladies. Surely this time Edmonton's wonderful Wop was going to kill himself.

"Oh, I don't like to see him do that!" cried a terrified woman.

"Gee, I want to go up with Wop," sighed a small boy as Everybody's Hero dropped crazily down the sky.

"You'll do no such thing!" snapped his mother, in her excitement fearfully grabbing him by the shoulder lest at that instant he too take off.

Falling, falling, falling, the plane tumbled earthward. Now the huge crowd was too spellbound even to scream, too spellbound even to breathe.

At the very last moment, when everyone was convinced that something *must* be wrong, Wop levelled out of it.

Then George Gorman took over. Flying low, he roared over the heads of the crowd standing by the fence. Swish! He was racing straight for the sardine-packed grandstand. Round and round he swooped and pirouetted.

"Duck!" roared the crowd. He was charging at them again.

"Good thing I didn't wear a hat today," grinned a spectator. "He'd have taken it off that time."

"Yeh. Missed mine by only half an inch," weakly murmured another.

Next Wop May provided another climax. He began looping the loop. Some among the craning crowds found breath enough to count out loud.

"One, two, three . . . six, seven! Not again, surely! Yes, eight. Eight times he looped the loop."

"That must be a record. I'll bet you don't see that done often, even down in the States. Or over in Europe either."

Would anyone care to risk his neck flying with those daredevils? Amazingly enough, quite a few mustered courage to say yes.

So Wop flew his plane back to the St. Albert trail hangar and there did a brisk business in passenger-freighting.

For the less intrepid, there was a quiet little soar in the beautiful blue heavens above the lush green fields and the summer-girt city. For the bold, there were giddy loops and plunging dives guaranteed to tingle the spine of even the most venturesome.

This was the heyday of the air age suddenly blossoming, after the seemingly unending grey war days with their tragic casualty lists, their crushing defeats, their dearly-bought victories. All at once the aeroplane was become a symbol of fun and frolic and fair-time. Absolutely endless appeared its popularity as a thrill-speller and a joy-riding vehicle.

As yet, the skies were wide open. There were no chilling governmental regulations of any kind to say what a flyer must, or must not, do. A pilot in his plane was free as any bird on the wing to go where he pleased and to do what he pleased.

Especially did daredevil May's performances blaze a shining record.

"Twenty-three turns in one dive," counted the onlookers. "Edmonton's hero of the air and his dun-coloured plane are the sensation of the fair circuit," summed up the press.

To give a flying start to the Edmonton fair's closing parade, Wop winged his way clear down main Jasper Avenue, fairly scraping the pavement as he led the string of bright floats and blaring bands.

Then, to add a final flourish to a gala week, again it was advertised and arranged that air and earth would once more compete for honours. George Gorman in the *Edmonton* and, this time, Wild Bill Endicott in a Hudson Super-Six were to burn up air and track in a desperate race before the grandstand.

Again, the elements triumphed. The wind blew so hard that Gorman was once more hopelessly grounded.

In spite of this off-key note from the weather, the great Victory fair had smashed all former attendance records and enabled the directors to tuck away a nice profit against a rainy day or two.

"No wonder our men had such a mess to clean up," sighed City Engineer Haddow as he carefully made his inspection rounds, accompanied by newly-returned Lieutenant Jimmy Bell. "It was a splendid show, thanks to your air friends."

"Yes. Those boys put on a grand show all right. Not much future in it, though. Besides," Jimmy repeated stubbornly, "there are better uses for the aeroplane, here in this northland."

While a few, like Jimmy Bell, shook their heads, the milling crowds thought otherwise. The aeroplane was a first-rate circus attraction.

At the same time, May Airplanes Limited was ready for any other kind of business, ready for freighting, ready for passenger carrying, ready for anything. Meanwhile, the company snatched at all the lucrative barnstorming engagements to be wheedled from fair boards far or near.

So, while Wop May went on to Saskatoon to fly for the Circuit A

fairs, George Gorman became a flying knight-errant of the rural skies. With his pockets full of contracts for the B shows, he set forth into the countryside, riding the Jenny *Edmonton*, on a month-long stint of derring-do. Before him in the open cockpit flew his equally courageous mechanic, Pete Derbyshire.

Straddling the Calgary-Edmonton rail lines, they set out first for the one-hundred mile distant city of Red Deer. Following their overhead progress southward, many a spectator warmed to the vivid memory of the little Stinson's first sky-race of the previous summer above the same rail lines.

Within an hour and a half after leaving the Sporle pasture, Gorman and Derbyshire dropped down in a dramatic descent right before the Red Deer grandstand. The Jenny now was gaily redeaubed a brilliant blue, with red trim, that completely hid her wartime dun. Rechristened too with the more dignified name, *City of Edmonton*, she made an instant hit with the pleasure-minded throng.

There in the dark of night, aided by flares and beacons, plane and pilot roared wildly back and forth across the sky to stage a sham battle over the placid wooded valley of the Red Deer river. It was no wonder their performance earned them the proud press citation, "most popular feature of the fair."

Going on to lake-bejewelled Camrose, their next point of contract, they had to sit out a daytime gale. By evening, it had blown itself out and pilot and plane had their aerial innings.

Here, too, Gorman and the *City of Edmonton* competed in an air-earth race that must have planted many a new notion of sky-medium travel in the spectators' minds. While a Miss Adams burned up the earthen course in a frantic Ford, above her George Gorman urged the Jenny to fly her utmost.

The Jenny won, by a narrow margin. Gallantry could permit no more.

Swooping over the pleasant parkland northeasterly to the border town of Lloydminster, here again Gorman distributed more from his plentiful stock of thrills to the delighted fairgoers. Then he and Derbyshire hustled on to North Battleford in Saskatchewan. There the hot prairie winds blew so fiercely that they were grounded most of the time.

Next, at Prince Albert, they ran, or rather flew, into another kind of hurdle. The exhibition grounds where they contrived to come down were quite unsuitable and unsafe. Over at the government-

owned penitentiary grounds, the prisoners maintained a nice level platter of green lawn. Permission was arranged and thereafter, on each flight, Gorman rose from and descended to the "pen" grounds and the warden allowed all the prisoners out to see the now famous *City of Edmonton*.

Returning towards Alberta, near Viscount they encountered an especially fearsome thunderstorm. Their closest brush with death was yet to be dodged.

Out of gas as they neared the town of Winyard, they touched earth in a bordering field of waving grain. Once more they fuelled up, but there simply wasn't space in the field for a takeoff. Taxiing out of it and into the main street of Winyard, they manoeuvred along its well-beaten length of level trail until they were able to lift the *Edmonton* back into the sky.

Safe down at Yorkton, where motor car speed-devil Jules Ellingboe cavorted about on a wing of the Jenny, they decided to joust with death no longer. They shipped themselves and the faithful old "bus" back home to Edmonton by rail.

Not only had they completed one of the longest barnstorming junketings so far in the wild west, they had stared danger in the face with much more uncomfortable frequency than had their rivaling attractions on the fair circuits, the tightrope balancers, the muscle men, the auto racers. At the larger exhibitions, equally thrill-packed and hazardous were the contracts Wop May continued to fulfil.

At last, with the gay summer season gone, both Gorman and May were back in Edmonton, still skin-whole and hustling to drum up fresh business to keep them in the air.

Around the sleepy city by the end of August, times were pretty quiet. Gone was the stir of summer fair and annual holidays. Even right "down town" along Jasper Avenue and 101st Street, on the Saturday night of August 30, there was nothing much doing, nothing to suggest impending tragedy.

Suddenly the sound of a shot cut the still air.

Bravely dashing across 101st street to investigate, a late-nighter was horrified to find, sprawled on the sidewalk just outside the old Canadian Northern depot, the body of a navy-blue-clad policeman.

By the time Monday's newspapers announced to a shocked citizenry



the story of the cold-blooded shooting, the victim, Constable Hugh Nixon, had died, from a bullet-wound fired by a desperate hold-up man. He had regained consciousness only long enough to disclose some clues establishing the name of his slayer.

Hastily the police force set to work. The murderer was positively identified, identified as J. G. Larsen, an ex-convict, but not caught. In fact, he had escaped, it was definitely discovered, back to the Coalbranch area, in the rugged foothills west of Edmonton, from which he had come.

Speed was now essential if he were not completely to elude police clutches.

"Why not get Wop May," someone in headquarters suggested, "to fly Detective James Campbell out to the Coalbranch to direct the hunt?"

Mayor Joe Clarke was approached.

"Could Captain Wilfred May have permission to fly the *City of Edmonton* out to the Coalbranch to take part in the search for the wanted criminal?"

"Yes. Certainly," agreed Mayor Clarke.

Anticipating another famous criminal hunt he was to take part in thirteen years later, hurriedly Wop prepared to set forth. The man they sought was believed to be extremely dangerous. So both he and Detective Campbell were fully armed. Quickly the *Edmonton* roared up from the pasture. For the first time in the history of police chases in Canada, an aeroplane was joining the army of policemen on foot, on horseback and in automobiles, all engaging in the scouring search.

The plane's first destination was Edson, the woods-encircled junction on the main rail line ninety miles west of Edmonton from which the spur into the Coalbranch mining area snaked southward.

Fearfully those who knew the countryside there shook their heads. The whole area was a wildly rolling and shaggy foothill wilderness prickling with rough muskeg and stubby forest growth. Somehow, May and his passenger got down at Edson.

"After considerable difficulty," he reported afterward, "we succeeded in landing in a very small space between telegraph wires and a gully near the railway station."

There it was discovered that the wanted man had bought a ticket to Mountain Park, some sixty miles south at the extreme tip of the coal-carrying line.

"Absolutely impossible to land there," May was told. "Nothing but thick timber and muskeg."

That spelled no alternative. Detective Campbell boarded the next train to Mountain Park and Wop May studied ways of taking off homeward from Edson's unpromising terrain, with its blocking bush, uneven ground, and overhead wires.

Finally he chose the kind of out that George Gorman had more than once resorted to in his summer sorties. He taxied down the portion of the famed old trail that was main street, at whose junction had taken place so many bizarre departures beginning the long wagon trek north to the promising Peace River country.

Flying eastward at two thousand feet, into the teeth of a forty-mile wind, Wop began to fight his way toward home. By the time he had reached beautiful Lake Wabamun, still some forty miles west of Edmonton, he was out of gas. In this largely bush area, he had the great luck to find, by the lakeshore, a small rough field. On it he contrived to get down without disaster.

Refuelled, there was again the ticklish problem of takeoff.

"I came into contact with the tree-tops," he described later. "So I had to dive the machine toward the lake water to gain speed."

To the great relief and unbounded delight of older brother Court, and everyone else for that matter, he presently floated down to a perfect landing by the company's hangar on the small Sporle pasture.

"I was sure the machine would return on a flat car," Court admitted then. "I was positive he'd be unable to land anywhere without crashing."

From all sides rose an enthusiastic chorus of praise for the skill, judgment and bravery of war-hero Wop.

"It was the most hazardous and dangerous trip," he laconically admitted, "in all my experience of flying."

And, as fate was to decree, it was yet only a kind of mild initiation for a flight out in the Edmonton hinterland that the future held in store for him.

"Some day," Jimmy Bell and his comrades of the R.A.F. nodded their heads, "the mounted police will be using aeroplanes regularly for that sort of thing. Especially in the north."

Detective Campbell had his own exciting sequel to that first plane-aided manhunt in the wild Alberta foothills. The wanted Larsen, who was captured, sure enough, on the Coalbranch line, was being brought north to Edson by rail speeder, in custody of Campbell and another

policeman. As the speeder, hurtling forward through driving rain, raced down a steep incline, the handcuffed prisoner catapulted off and plunged into the thick bordering bush. It was late the following day before a much augmented police cordon recaptured him and Detective Campbell was able to resume his homeward trip.

Niggling dispatches had been appearing in the newspapers that spring and summer of 1919 telling of stunting pilots flying their planes under the bridges at Niagara Falls. Here, Edmonton had a High Level Bridge which claimed the proud distinction of longest high bridge in all the west.

And here, Edmonton had a pilot whose daring evolutions in the air were, as some one summed up, "Like hell to watch," whose amazing exploits had made him the idolized darling of young and old.

"I bet you," boasted the local lads now on reading of the eastern exploits, "Wop too could fly the Niagara. Wop can do anything. He could even fly right under the High Level Bridge."

As if he'd heard these bragging words, Wop took up the dare. A week after his criminal-hunting flight to the wooded wilderness around Edson, he did just that.

With Lieutenant Ray Ross as companion, he zoomed into the air from the hangar on the St. Albert trail. Preluding first with a spectacular display of tricks, he soared around and above the city, looping, rolling, spinning, tumbling. Then he swooped low over the golf links in the river flat and rose up over the legislative park grounds.

Up he swerved above the magnificent dome of the legislative buildings, curving right over the nearby site of Old Fort Edmonton where Chief Factors John Rowand and Richard Hardisty had watched York boat and canoe and horse breast the swirling Saskatchewan, and painted Indian come to trade.

Next, dropping so low over the river that it seemed he too might have to swim for it, in the open-cockpitted Curtiss he skimmed the water upstream for several hundred yards, disappeared under the black girders of the High Level Bridge, and emerged safely on the other side.

"As graceful as the flight of a bird over the water," commented an admirer.

"Just as if there were nothing to it," added another, exhaling freely again.

Now the *City of Edmonton* rose gradually and effortlessly from the river valley, soared above the high west-end bank and up over house and bush and prairie meadow near the area where Reginald Hunt's first home-made plane had startled residents ten years before. Northwesterly Wop roared on, once more to alight unscathed on the pasture patch by the St. Albert trail.

Demonstrating the variety of chores accomplishable by the young aeroplane company, Wop went on that busy September to bag a whole bushel of aerial undertakings.

Saying "Thank you," to the outermost parts of empire that had come to the aid of the mother country in the world's greatest war, while kindling at the same time a bright spark in the drear post-war stagnation, the genial Prince of Wales was making a triumphal tour of western Canada.

So, to greet him fittingly in the most modern manner as he approached Alberta's capital, Captain Wilfred May, D.F.C., flew the *Edmonton* out to a bristly harvest field beyond the southern outskirts.

As the royal train roared into view, Wop rose gracefully as a mallard from the golden stubble. He flew low to circle the train, almost kissing the ground in a deep curtsy of salute. Barely missing fenceposts and treetops, he then escorted His Royal Highness all the way into the waiting city.

Next, while the debonair prince was being whisked on a motor tour around the metropolis, and paying his respects to the war's crippled casualties in the south-side military hospital, Wop, assisted by Lieutenant Ross, soared above to take the first aerial photographs of Edmonton. Publication of a number of these in the local press was irrefutable testimony of a new sphere of usefulness of the aeroplane, a new answer to those who still stubbornly saw it only as a war instrument and a circus curiosity.

At this time, rivalry between old feuding enemies Edmonton and Calgary was particularly bitter. Edmonton was slowly recovering from a body-blow, a badly-burst boom. Calgary had struck oil. But

neither had struck it rich in this war-paralyzed period. Edmonton had a mayor whose spirit was characteristic of many of its enterprising citizens. He'd try anything once.

Later that September, a championship ball game was scheduled to be played in Edmonton's Renfrew Park on the Ross flats by the Saskatchewan river, when that city's Veterans were to meet the Calgary Hustlers. A huge turnout attendance was desired, to show Cow-town Calgarians how a sport-minded city could bolster morale to support its home team.

"Why not," some inspired committee member proposed, "have Mayor Clarke throw the opening ball from Wop May's plane?"

This would be indeed a novel and crowd-drawing way to open an important ball game. If only the Mayor were willing.

Jovial Joe Clarke took a deep breath. Ready as a good mayor should be even to flirt with death for his beloved city, he agreed.

"Good sport Mayor Joe Clarke," a newspaper announced, "is to make a flight in Captain May's plane, flying over the ground in many deeds of skill and daring. He is going to drop a few baseballs. It is also suggested that as an added attraction he drop a ripe tomato."

The sportswriter left it to the reader's imagination to guess for whom the latter was intended.

Promptly on schedule, at 3.30 in the afternoon of Wednesday the twenty-fourth, Wop and the Mayor climbed into the air from the Walter Sporle ranch. Northeasterly they cruised, straight for the baseball diamond in the broad north-side river flat. They swooped and circled low over the playing field, over the two teams lined up ready for action, over the cheering spectators. They stunted and dived and looped the loop.

Then they headed off for a turn about the city.

"Did you drop the ball?" Wop shouted to Mayor Joe.

"No," the mayor shook his head. "I thought you were going to," he added weakly.

"We'll have to go back then," roared May. "You drop it this time. I'll tell you when."

No wonder the unfortunate mayor was a bit confused about this little stint of mayoral duty.

"I knew I was in Alberta," he grinned ruefully afterward. "And that was all."

They went back. With his usual consummate skill and daring,

Wop downed the *Edmonton* to within ten feet of the plate. This time Mayor Joe hurled the ball. A perfect throw, right over the plate it whanged and someone caught it.

After more spectacular diving and looping over the diamond, Wop treated his passenger to a playful spin under the High Level Bridge. For forty minutes His Worship twisted and tossed in the over-Edmonton blue.

"Well, what did you think of it?" the group crowding around the mayor wanted to know as he staggered from the plane.

"I'm glad I went up," he grinned. "But a whole lot more tickled I got down. Those diving stunts were the worst. Made me seasick."

"I'll bet the Mayor is secretly pleased that Wop has given him the works," shrewdly guessed one of the spectators. "Then he won't have to endure a repeat performance."

"I'd rather travel in a motor car down Jasper Avenue at one hundred and twenty-five miles an hour," Mayor Joe gasped, "than in an aeroplane at the rate of a mile a week."

Still chuckling over the genial first citizen's gallant gesture to introduce a new usefulness for the aeroplane in Edmonton, the little band of ex-war-pilots was presently casting about for new ways to encourage citizens to lift their thoughts skyward.

Back in the spring Major John Inwood, secretary of the Aero Club of Canada, had visited the city to spur an organization among local aviation enthusiasts. Now in the autumn a preliminary meeting was held, and on November 14, one year and three days after the armistice concluding the fateful conflict that had altered all their lives, an Edmonton Air Force Association came into being.

Chosen to chair that first formal meeting was the dedicated Captain Wilfred May. Among those who answered the roll that night were others who had given a dazzling account of themselves overseas and who were destined to no less astounding aerial accomplishment in the years to follow.

Objectives of the infant association were to be twofold. First came the crying need of the moment, as these young ex-warbirds saw it, to promote and assist aviation in all its branches in Edmonton and Alberta. Second followed another important "must," to maintain and foster that esprit de corps which had helped to win the war.

To publicize the first and nourish the second, tentative plans were

laid for an opening ball. On the committee to make arrangements were Lieutenant Jimmy Bell and a slight brown-haired lad, a lieutenant with the attractive name of Clennell Dickins and the aggressive nickname by which every one knew him of "Punch."

Only this small select group who were acquainted with his aerial record to date might have pointed to this quiet nineteen-year-old veteran with the grey-green eyes and said,

"Destiny will mark him out."

At the moment, despite the flurry of business so far accruing to the May Airplane Company, the future was as shadowy as some of the nightmares these young men had suffered before and after the agonizing episodes they had shared across the sea. Now new hopes were being born with the new club, fresh plans were in the making, and talk, turning back to those bitter-sweet days, filled the air thick as the smoke.

To Lieutenant Jimmy Bell, employed with the Veterans' Re-Establishment Board, nothing brought back certain experiences more vividly than the sight of Irish-born Captain Keith Tailyour.

A former farmer of the Lesser Slave Lake area in northern Alberta, Captain Tailyour had lived later in Edmonton and still more lately had been overseas with the Royal Flying Corps. There he had rapidly risen to become pilot-instructor extraordinary.

On the training aerodromes in England, word was flashed about lightning-like if a new arrival were a Canadian or had so much as paid a flying visit to Canada. So, at the Gosport School in Tern Hill, Shropshire, Lieutenant Bell was soon engaged in conversation with the crack airman Captain Tailyour.

"Edmonton, eh. I know Edmonton pretty well too. Ever been as far as Lesser Slave Lake?"

"No, sir. I hope to see it some day, when all this show is over."

They found plenty to talk about nonetheless, refreshing talk about Canada that was a bright prick of sunbeam through the thick-enveloping grey fog of war.

Already Captain Tailyour, who promptly at the war's onset had gone overseas with the artillery, and early had answered the desperate call for volunteers to the Flying Corps, had served his turn in the battle-blackened skies of France and Germany, where an airman's life was calculated to last twelve hours.

Spelled off then to do a stint of instructing, back in England Tailyour excelled to the point where he was next detailed to instruct and



inspect the instructors. Like an auditor descending unannounced to ferret out all the inmost dealings and contrivings of a business corporation, Captain Tailyour would suddenly drop from the sky to check the smallest details in a training squadron's performance.

"Well, what's it to be now? Farming or flying?" Lieutenant Jimmy wanted to know.

"Flying, I hope," was Captain Tailyour's answer. "I have a plan in mind."

In the next months, Tailyour pushed his plan into a concrete mould. From this beginning dream of his evolved a tiny nucleus that was to carry down through Edmonton's history, shaping eventually into giant buildings and a web of astounding events that would then have been beyond the wildest dreams of Visionary and Expert Airman Tailyour.

## 1920

CAPTAIN TAILYOUR came to the point at once. The thick-set man behind the desk had a shrewd business head. The idea Tailyour was about to propose might come as a terrific shock. Just the same, there was no use wasting time over preliminaries.

"Jock," he began, "I want you to buy an aeroplane."

McNeill the Mover, a Glasgow-born Scot who had come to Edmonton in 1910, had sweated, through good times and bad, to build up not only a flourishing van and transport business but, as well, a fleet of up-to-date taxis. He was progressive and ambitious.

Tailyour talked fast and he talked convincingly. The air age had dawned over the battlefields of Europe. It had dawned and reached the high noon of day. What the desperate needs of war had adopted and developed for purposes of destruction was already, over there, being adapted to new purposes of usefulness. What America with its vast spaces, and particularly Alberta and Edmonton, needed, too, was aeroplanes.

"You'll need an aerial taxi, Jock, to bring your business up to date. Instead of bombs, we'll carry people and freight. It'll be a money-maker."

It was that same unshakeable conviction that Wop May and George Gorman and Jimmy Bell persistently clung to that fired Tailyour's enthusiasm. In the end, cautious and wary Jock McNeill allowed himself, too, to be convinced. He agreed to try to persuade other business men to join with him in the setting up of a properly incorporated company.

In Montreal, Tailyour informed him, he'd heard there was an Avro machine going for sale cheap. They decided to make further inquiries about this bargain plane.

"Now, what about a hangar and a bit of field in which to take off and land?"

McNeill and Tailyour looked about carefully.

Edging a completely undeveloped section of the northwest corner of the sprawling city was a two-mile ribbon of pavement that gave the remote northern Edmonton a possession unique on the face of the globe. This almost unused wide band of concrete, the real-estate-promotion fiasco of all time, had been grandly christened Portage Avenue.

According to Believe-It-Or-Not Ripley, this Edmonton Avenue was the longest paved street in the world on which no house or other building had ever been erected.

Not so much as a single tiny dwelling faced on this one-hundred-foot-wide roadway. A cultivated field or two smeared black beside it. Otherwise nothing flanked its either side but a virgin expanse of flat meadowland, matted with buffalo wool that was pricked in spring with tiny violets and buttercups, and dotted with small scattered clumpings of dwarf willow.

Only two pairs of never-used steel streetcar rails marred the centre strip of this avenue, so broad that by day timid learners taking their first auto-driving lessons crept safely along its outer skirtings. On their left, daredevil drivers pelted by them at speeds whispered to exceed, sometimes, even thirty and forty miles per hour.

By night, moon or no moon, Edmonton's Portage Avenue became a parkers' paradise. So accessible it was, yet so secluded, for couples snuggled in Model T Fords or touring McLaughlins.

"Wouldn't this Portage make a grand runway?" chuckled McNeill, and more than a decade later round-the-globe fliers proved him right.

Breasting Portage toward its northwest extremity was the level-lying farm land of Pioneer John Hagmann.

"How about a smooth bit of his old cow-pasture?" Jock suggested to his pilot friend. To a layman, the spot looked ideal for the new aerial taxi-van business.

Tailyour considered. Yes. Here was ample room, vast and empty, with pushed-back horizons, and over it the enormous expanse of polished clear-blue sky. Here was an ideal setting. If they could lease, say, an acre or two of this level land, their air harbour would have ready and convenient access to Portage Avenue.

So, during that winter of 1919-1920, Jock McNeill got busy. A number of acquaintances were invited to participate in this money-making enterprise. Presently, on January 28th, there appeared in

the *Alberta Gazette* notice that the "Edmonton Airplane Company is this day incorporated. Capital stock, \$50,000.00."

A couple of days later, the newspapers announced the birth of the new company:

Aviation as a commercial enterprise is apparently assured for Edmonton this coming season, another company having been formed, to be called the Edmonton Airplane Company, and including in its incorporations John McNeill of the Twin City Taxis, Peter McArthur, Captain Keith Tailyour, E. Owens, R. L. Greene.

Their idea is to start commercial flights for either passengers, mail or express, and they are getting large planes that will accommodate four people and a pilot.

One of the first routes to be opened up, according to the promoters, will be between Edmonton and Calgary. They will put on two or four trips a day as the demand warrants. They are also considering a trip to Peace River, which, in planes capable of 125 miles an hour, will be only a matter of a couple of hours.

President McNeill and Manager-Pilot Tailyour completed details of the leasing of a small patch of the Hagmann farmland. Then they arranged for the erection thereon of a modest hangar to house the Avro being shipped from the east. An annual fee of one hundred and fifty dollars paid for the ground rental of the land and for the privilege of taking off and landing on the balance of the estate.

All this was taking a big step, blindfolded, away into the future. In the ten years since he'd stepped off the boat in Montreal, Jock had built up a lively thriving business by keeping abreast of the times, changing from horse to motor engine as business pointed the way. This time, he wasn't so sure. He couldn't see into the future, to know whether his Edmonton Airplane Company would thrive or fail.

Especially, he couldn't guess that, in the years way ahead, thousands dropped down en route to or from Tokyo or Toledo, London or Los Angeles, stepping onto this bit of Hagmann cow-pasture become a crossroads of the world, would note with approval the wide apron of level landing field, extended so broadly under the even vaster brittle dome of sky. And withal so conveniently close to the uncluttered pavement of Portage.

Quite naturally now, he worried.

"How are we going to make money?"

"By barnstorming," Tailyour reassured him. "And carrying passengers. At fifteen dollars a fare, or even twenty, thousands will want to go up."

Wop May and Freddie McCall and George Gorman and all the others thought the same. For sceptics, they had one answer.

"What about Henry Ford? Didn't every one try to tell him, 'No one will ride in the new horseless cars'?"

That next summer of 1920 saw the peak heyday of the barn-storming aeronautics-display era, with the bang-up glorious climax provided during the Edmonton Exhibition.

May and Gorman and Tailyour dazzled the throngs with their superb stunting and daring dogfighting. Then, to provide aerial thrills hitherto undreamed of, out of the south there came the great Locklear.

"Come and see the nerve-burning performances of Lieutenant Ormer Locklear," advertisements blazed. "Greatest flying show in history of amusement world."

Assisted by other American pilots, Lieutenant Shirley Short and Lieutenant Milton Elliott, the fearless Locklear was to display the dizzy feats he had begun to dream up down in the air-training field at Fort Worth in Texas, the great state that seemed to inspire sky-flying courage as unlimited as her broad acres.

First, the three Americans warmed up the crowd with a vaudeville mock battle.

Then, with the perfect co-ordination, the quick hand, and the keen eye of a stage magician, a three-ring-circus stunter and an accomplished acrobat all in one, Locklear walked the wings. While his machine was in flight, like an agile panther he scampered about from the seat of his plane to all other parts of the craft.

Next, to show how easy it all was, he hung by his feet and stood on his head.

"Marvellous," gasped the crowd. "Simply tremendous."

In the movie film just previously released in Edmonton, Locklear was seen to do his hair-raising stunts closer to the ground. In Canada governmental authorities were beginning to clamp down, mildly as yet, on aeronautical madcappery that so obviously endangered lives. In December of 1919 a set of air regulations had been drafted. Early in 1920 an order-in-council created a brand-new Canadian Air Board to see to the enforcement of the regulations.

Locklear, the board now insisted, must keep well up in the air to permit a safe landing for his plane should anything go wrong.

Still operating low enough and near enough for the breathless crowds in grandstand and enclosure to follow his every daredevil movement, Locklear went on to perform his climaxing caper.

Only a few hundred feet above the green turf fronting the grand-

stand, without the aid of rope ladder or other assistance, he leapt from one plane down to another. This was Canada's one and only sample, reports claimed, of such a death-defying feat.

For a moment the watching throng was silent as the grave.

"OOhh!" they breathed at last in awestruck wonder.

Still another novel stunt was in store for the fairgoers. A courageous showman with the Johnny Jones entertainers, "Hootis" Killenger, climbed into Gorman's plane and, at 1500 feet above the race-track, plunged from the stalled machine to give Edmonton its first breath-stopping experience of parachute jumping.

Then Killenger fell ill and had to be rushed to hospital.

At this piece of bad luck, Wop May, too, was nigh worried sick. His struggling company had an all-important contract to supply a daily parachute thrill for the exhibition audiences.

To step up business to match the rival Edmonton Airplane Company, back in February May Airplanes Limited had scraped together sufficient funds to increase its capital stock, too, to \$50,000. In March George Gorman became a full partner and the name was officially registered as the May-Gorman Company.

Prospects for better things to come to the pioneering infant were augured after a visit to Edmonton in May of newly-appointed Air Board officers L. S. Breadner and J. S. Scott, when both partner-pilots successfully qualified for dominion licences. To Wilfred Reid (Wop) May was allotted Commercial Licence No. Seven, and to George Washington Gorman Licence No. Eight. Their mechanic, Pete Derbyshire, readily measured up to requirements too, receiving Canada Air Engineer Certificate Number Six.

Even the old bus, *City of Edmonton*, got an official nod, proudly displaying first Canadian registration lettering of C-AA1. Contracts came pouring in from the fair boards and all signs pointed to a grand flying start for the summer.

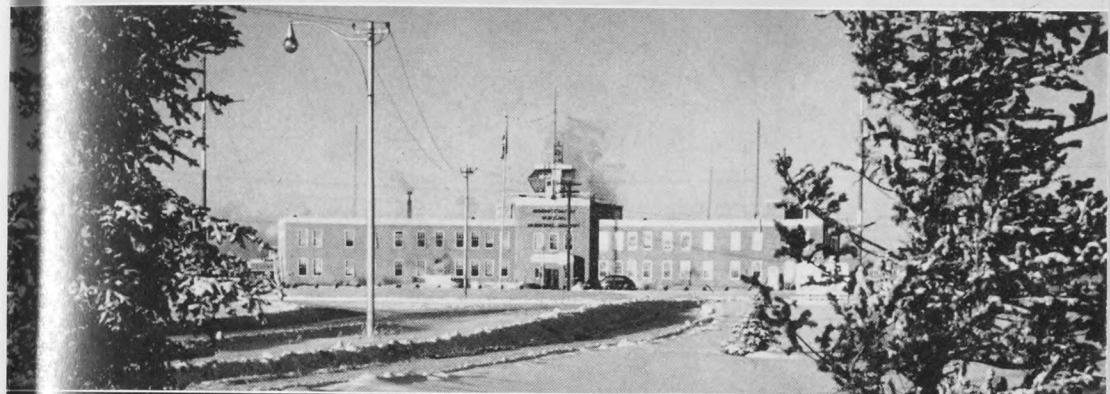
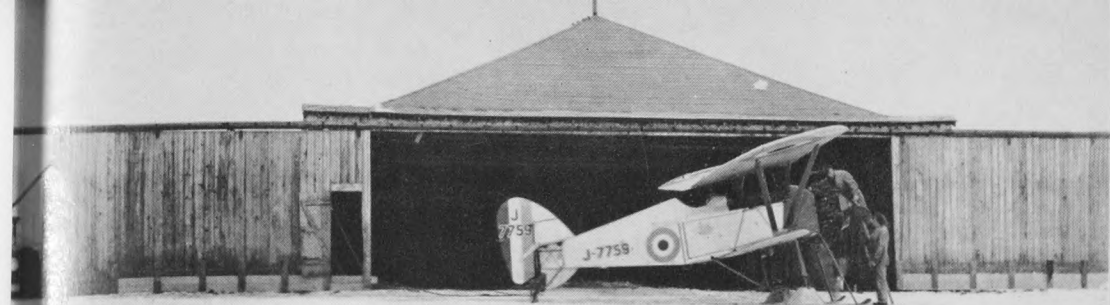
Now with Killenger ill, how could the May-Gorman company fulfil its vital contract with the Edmonton Exhibition Board?

Worried Wop looked contemplatively over the slight figure of his twenty-one-year-old mechanic.

After all, Pete had often crawled like a fly all over the *Edmonton* when she was high in the air. Obviously he had a steely nerve to match his own.

"How about it, Pete? Will you try a jump? To save our contract?"





The *Siskin*, winter of 1926-1927. The hangar, at Edmonton, had no heat, line or telephone.

Present administration building erected early in World War Two on the Blatchford Field, Edmonton.

Edmonton, January 1927. Left to right: Professor Robb, Univ. of Alberta; City Engineer A. W. Haddow; Punch Dickins; K. A. Blatchford, M.P., former Mayor; Sam Ferris, City Land Superintendent.





While Wop May waited at McMurray, some of the men flying north with the first air-mail to Aklavik pose for the camera. *Left to right* (front row): Don Robinson, Reg Jackson, "Boom" Lumsden, Archie McMullen, Stan Green: (standing): Idris Glyn-Roberts, Cy Becker, northern fur trader, Supt. Walter Hale, Captain Moss Burbidge, Reporter Ted Watt.

Air-mail pilot Paul Calder and Postmaster F. H. Smith at the inaugural flight of the air-mail service — Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary, Winnipeg. Dec., 1928.

Vigorously Pete shook his head. "What! Me jump? No siree!"  
 "Bet you're scared to try."

Pete of course denied this.

Wop persisted. "I dare you to try. Just once."

Finally Pete grunted, "O.K. Maybe I'll give it a try."

"Let's go over to the hospital," suggested Wop quickly, "and talk it over with Killenger."

From his hospital bed Hootis Killenger, the "new air sensation" who had jumped from 1500 feet high in the sky to bedazzle the Edmonton crowds, demonstrated now to Wop and Pete how it was done.

"We'll get up at five in the morning," planned May. "We'll go out to the aerodrome before anyone's around and give it a try."

"All right," mumbled Derbyshire.

Strapped round chest and shoulders by the parachute harness and armed with a sharp knife, Pete clambered into the plane's front seat. The parachute itself was secured by a two-inch-thick rope tied around the body of the plane just behind the pilot's seat.

Wop lifted the *Edmonton* through the moist morning air to some 1500 feet above the airfield. Pete crawled out of the front seat, up past Pilot May, and out onto the left wing. Then, by means of a clevis, he hooked the parachute to his harness and stepped off into space.

For some moments he hung there, four to five feet below the moving machine. He looked down. Over in the distance lay the sleeping city. Directly below was a fairly level green field. Pulling the knife from his pocket, he cut the rope to detach the parachute from the plane.

Like a bullet he plummeted down some four hundred feet. Then, miracle of miracles, the parachute began to open. Within moments he was sailing pleasantly earthward. Presently his running shoes kicked against hard ground and he scrambled to stand once more upon them.

That afternoon, before the watching thousands gathered in the fair grounds, Pete jumped again.

"Be sure," Killenger had warned him, "to pack layers of newspaper between the parachute ropes so they won't tangle as it opens."

Oblivious of the shower of paper or of its meaning, the marvelling crowds had eyes only for the small human figure sailing down sky under the giant parachute.

As he alighted within the grounds, they pushed forward to get a closer view of this first Canadian to jump at the Alberta capital.

"What does it feel like?" they insisted curiously.

Pete was pretty laconic about the whole business.

"Well," he admitted finally, "your stomach kind of comes into your mouth. Like in an elevator dropping down very rapid in the McLeod building. Only this is like fifteen or twenty McLeod buildings piled one on top of the other."

The McLeod building, nine storeys high, was Edmonton's newest and tallest skyscraper.

"What do you think about? Aren't you afraid of landing high in some treetop or on a steep roof?"

You had to watch, he told them, for a "soft place to light." Altogether, his mind was quite well occupied, he assured them, from the time he left the ground until he was safely landed again.

The following Monday he set forth, with Pilot Gorman in the *Edmonton*, for another aerial assault of the Circuit B fairs. This second summer these fairs were to feature the added attraction of parachute-jumping by the wiry little mechanic.

Their first point of contract, again Red Deer, offered, from the exalted eyes of a parachutist stepping from an aeroplane wing, the very trickiest set-up of the whole circuit. The exhibition grounds were crammed into a smallish area by the river flat and hugged by a stalwart stand of woods edging the swift-flowing Red Deer.

Anticipating his possible descent into the swirling water, when encumbered as he was by parachute and harness, death by drowning would inevitably follow, his employers had taken the precaution to provide him with a life-saving coat stuffed with the corklike material used in life-preservers.

Added to all the other hazards, a mean wind was blowing when time came for the scheduled jump. Gorman did his very best, stalling the *Edmonton* at the spot calculated to give Pete the most favourable chance for a happy landing.

Goggle-eyed, the crowd saw him step into the sky. Moments later, he was slipping earthward, tailed by the billowing parachute. Down, down he curved. Yes. He was going to miss the precipitous bank all right. And the water. And the tall trees.

Right toward the ferris wheel he sailed. Whoops. He barely missed scraping his heels against the big joy-rider. Now he was

coming down straight for the steep grandstand roof. Helpless, their eyes rolling down sky with him, the crowd froze. His luck held. Grazing the grandstand, he sank blissfully on the track a few feet from it, right beside the judges' stand.

If all these fair-time aeronautics were not enough to induce a growing airmindedness among Edmonton and district residents, later in the month an event of unusual significance was to turn their thoughts skyward in a new direction.

Down in the United States, already General Billy Mitchell had envisioned the black disaster of Pearl Harbour. Already he had embarked on a preparedness campaign which his farsightedness assured him was the only course to pursue, a campaign which plunged him presently into the ignominy of court-martial and official disgrace.

"It's only fifty-two miles across the Bering Strait to Russia," the man nicknamed "the flying lunatic" insisted as he presented his startling scheme to Washington. "I want to send an air expedition to prove the feasibility of establishing an aerial route to Alaska. Some day we might want to use it to move men quickly to Asia."

Permission was finally granted. With his usual thorough-going zeal General Billy bustled about to make preparations.

Personally he tested each of the four planes to be used for the long jaunt. These were spanking new De Havilland 4B biplanes, equipped with Liberty motors.

To lead the eight-man group making the danger-filled air safari, the longest flight yet planned on the North American continent, he chose Captain St. Clair Streett, a veteran like himself of the European air battlefields.

"Is there some kind of suitable landing-strip available at Edmonton?" came presently the official enquiry.

"Yes," was flashed back the satisfactory answer. In fact, the discomfited airmen were later to learn, there were two aerodromes at Alberta's capital.

In this case, the prettily woods-trimmed pasture that was the May air harbour won out over the level Hagmann field, and Captain H. T. Douglas of the United States Army Air Service arrived to complete arrangements for a refueling stop there. His whole gigantic chore, as advance agent for the expedition, was to prepare landing and

fuelling bases at all sixteen points along the cross-continent path at which the planes would touch earth.

From Edmonton the route was to follow that blazed by Wop May on his pioneering jaunt to Edson the previous summer. Beyond that town, the planes would continue to soar above the main rail line to Jasper in the foothills.

Next, skimming over the Yellowhead pass, they were to thread their way northwestward over the most difficult and hazardous terrain in North America. Here they were to attempt the aerial crossing of a largely unknown region that was jugged with mountain ranges pointed by some of the continent's highest peaks, pricked with crowding forest, and crisscrossed by gorge, glacier and deadly canyon walls.

Undaunted by this forbidding prospect, and sparked by the burning zeal and faith in their ability of General Billy, the expedition left Mineola on Long Island right on schedule. From New York state they hopped to Erie on the lakeshore, and in smooth succession touched down at Grand Rapids, Winona and Fargo. From Portal on the boundary, they jumped easily up to Saskatoon in central Saskatchewan.

At last, on the Tuesday afternoon of July 27, came word that the great squadron was nearing Edmonton, approaching the city from the east.

Up rose Wop May and his passenger, Acting Mayor James East, to greet the visitors with fitting aerial courtesy. Out to the St. Albert trail wound hundreds of automobiles loaded with citizens, to hail the arrival here of the first airborne military expedition ever to battle the brisk prairie breezes.

Presently, out beyond the city's eastern outskirts appeared four specks in the robin's-egg-blue of sky. Soon the four specks swelled into four great shining silver birds. In brotherly salute, Wop dipped his wings.

Northwestward over the city, as directed, the planes soared. Invitingly, the broad expanse of Portage Avenue sprawled beneath them. On its right flank, the pilots spotted, between farm fields, a long level stretch that was obviously a landing strip, and beside it a building undoubtedly used as hangar.

Down the unsuspecting airmen spiralled over the waving Hagmann grainfields. With beautiful precision, one after the other they settled gracefully as giant swans on the levelled-off stretch that was now Jock McNeill's air harbour.

Wop, then, with Acting Mayor East, had to come down too. He rushed over to Flight Commander Streett.

"Sorry," he panted. "This is the wrong aerodrome."

"Wrong aerodrome?" Commander Streett was dumbfounded. Who would have dreamed that this tiny northern city he hadn't heard of until the plans for this flight were being hatched at General Billy's headquarters, would have not one, but two, airfields. A brief consultation followed. The special oil and gasoline pre-ordered by the American Government stood ready at the May airfield. It would be simpler and quicker to lift the planes out there than to transfer the waiting supplies. Besides, there were all those expectant people in all those cars that made two long winding black ribbons stretching for a mile or more along the twisting St. Albert trail.

So up again the four planes got. And up again got Wop. Guided by him, they soared over the flat prairie and low bush and a straggling building or two, to come down a half mile farther northwestward on the bit of Walter Sporle's pasture that was designated the May aerodrome. As each plane landed and from it clambered each courageous American couple, a wild chorus of cheering, clapping and honking greeted them. Maybe only a few of the jamming hundreds who pressed forward to get a better view could appreciate the tremendous implication of this pioneer flight.

Frank Oliver, publisher of the city's first newspaper, the *Bulletin*, thought of the times forty years before when he'd whipped his oxen along this trail, bound for the mission gristmill on the steep St. Albert hillside.

Mayor-to-be Kenny Blatchford thought of the ill-assorted expeditions, American, Canadian, British, that he'd watched, as an Edmonton lad twenty years before, setting out along this trail on the long death-haunted trek to the Yukon goldfields.

Alaska lay even beyond the Yukon, a vaguely far-away and inaccessible land whose distance was doubled by the impassable terrain separating her from settled Canada.

But Wop May and all the other local lads who'd flown in Europe and seen the impossible achieved there, thought now they could read the writing in the sky, to say this kind of flight could and would be done more and more frequently.

"We have a twofold reason for making this trip," Captain Streett announced at the big welcoming dinner held that night in the MacDonald hotel to honour these skyborne history-makers.



"In the first place, our government wishes to establish an aerial route to the extreme northwest corner of the American continent. Then it will be possible, should the need arise, to move United States army air units to Asia by direct flight."

A few heads, shrewdly sighting a possible yellow peril, nodded in agreement.

"Secondly, we desire to photograph from the air inaccessible areas of Alaska."

Pioneer Publisher Oliver pointed the contrasts befuddling all minds at this aerial leaping through history.

"Here it is only forty-four years," he reminisced to the gathering, "since I journeyed for two months to arrive in Edmonton by ox-cart. It's only eleven years since I saw Blériot first flying the English Channel. Now you gentlemen are en route to faraway Alaska. This expedition is as much of a contrast to that feat of eleven years ago as were the ox-carts of the past with modern means of transportation."

While most diners that night doubted these Columbuses of the air would ever again see homes and loved ones, a few, other than Oliver, foresaw this Alaska Flying Expedition as a portentous event with far-reaching consequences.

"My company," announced D. C. Coleman of the globe-girdling Canadian Pacific Railway, who happened to be present that evening, "is the first in Canada to obtain, and the only one in the world to hold, a charter for air transport."

"Of course we realize that the hardest part of the journey is still to be negotiated," Captain Streett readily admitted. "But only forced landings will mar the good fortune that has so far accompanied us. We don't anticipate any such contingency."

Every care and caution were being taken, he assured his hearers. This fact, together with the thorough preparation made by Advance Officer Douglas, would ensure their winning through to Nome, Alaska, and back safely again to New York. Just the same, their equipment provided for every kind of emergency and included a string of such possibly valuable extras as mosquito helmets, food concentrate, revolvers, shotguns and even fishing tackle.

Furiously the visitors worked at the thorough overhauling of their machines, spaced out on the turf of the May-Gorman airfield. They wanted to be able to lift them westward by Thursday, July 29th. When all seemed at the peak of readiness, a leaky gas tank developing in number two machine delayed their departure.

On Saturday, the 31st, they finally roared off.



"We cannot thank Edmontonians too much," repeated Captain Streett in appreciation of the extended hospitality.

He was soon to have to repeat his thanks yet again. Not too long after the takeoff, the annoyed buzzing of the sturdy Liberty motors was heard once more over the Sporle farm. Down the Americans dropped to the aerodrome, to report that between Edmonton and Jasper a severe storm, with three blinding cloud layers and fog, had forced them back.

"We're not going to take any chances at this stage of the game," the cautious captain announced. "We'll pick our days and carry on with a care that will be bound to bring success to our venture."

Next day, Sunday, they tried again. Again they were followed by hundreds of pairs of anxious eyes straining to cling to them as they diminished once more into mere specks that finally vanished in the western sky.

Hurriedly, on Monday, Edmonton citizens grasped their papers to read the good news that their new American friends had reached Jasper in safety.

Then they turned, suddenly horror-struck, to another front-page column. It told of tragedy befallen another new American air-challenging acquaintance. Lieutenant Ormer Locklear and his aide, Lieutenant Milton Elliott, already back in Los Angeles providing more sky-capering thrills for the movie camera, were killed when their plane crashed from a thousand-foot height.

Next word from the Alaska Expedition came from the mountain-girt Prince George. Here the aviators were forced to spend a whole week, repairing landing damage done to planes number one and number three.

Slowly dispatches continued to trickle back to Edmonton telling how the pilots and their planes were fighting forward toward their goal.

Despite a string of major and minor difficulties that continued to plague them, their compasses and their courage carried them onward, through rain and fog and perilous low-hanging cloud patch, over mountain and forest, gorge and glacier.

From Prince George they flew to Hazelton in British Columbia, next to White Horse and then Dawson in the Yukon. From there they persisted to Fairbanks in Alaska and then pressed forward to Ruby. At last the miracle was achieved. They reached Nome itself, the remote misty port on the Bering Sea that was their final destination.

Already the golden leaves had drifted down from the trees framing the May-Gorman aerodrome and mountain snowstorms had piled on yet another flying hazard when, homeward bound, on October the eighth, three of the four planes dropped safely to solid turf at Edmonton. One machine had gone on ahead to await the others across the American border.

By the twentieth of the month, all four had reached Mineola together. A nine-thousand-mile air journey to Alaska and back was no longer a wild dream but an accomplished fact.

"I will recommend to the war department that the route blazed be made permanent," modestly announced Captain Streett.

His commander, General Billy Mitchell, backed his recommendation with every persuasive ammunition he could muster. Here the impossible had been consummated. His Alaska Expedition had returned safely, with not a man nor a plane lost, from blazing a northwest passage to Asia that had been sought for centuries.

"At Nome," General Billy pointed out, "Captain Streett and his men stood on the threshold of Asia and could have crossed in an hour and a half." A fully-equipped air force based in Alaska, he went on to urge, was essential to the defence of America.

In Washington there was a warm official reception for the history-makers and a flurry of talk of plans and projects. Then, while Edmonton and the northwest waited for the whirr again of American wings, there followed only rumour and silence, and at last the court-martial of the father of the great Alaskan aerial brainchild.

It was to be twenty years before another series of world-wrenching events would give solid shape to General Billy's vision and Edmonton would find itself an important link in a chain of air bases flung north-westerly across the continent and looped across the Bering sea to Asia.

Already, that autumn of 1920, word from another far-northern area had roused the Alberta capital to fever-pitch excitement. Already her airmen and air-minded were dreaming in terms of thousand-mile-distant flights that would bring wealth untold to the city's back door.

## 1920-1921

"IN FACT, it promises to be the greatest oilfield the world has ever known."

This mushroomed statement, sprung from a cautious but optimistic report by experts, electrified the drowsy autumn air over Edmonton while the stirring hum of the Alaska Flying Expedition's motors was still droning a thousand miles to the northwest. Already around the city the flying business was as flat as were to be Mitchell's pricked dreams.

All summer May and Gorman and Tailyour had flown their utmost. In the spring, business had promised so well that the May-Gorman partnership had bought a new Curtiss and Jock McNeill's Edmonton Airplane Company shaped plans to buy a sister for the Avro already in use.

"The amount of business in view justifies the purchase," Manager-Pilot Tailyour optimistically announced.

To reduce constantly mounting red figures on their companies' ledgers, the pilots flew all the fair circuits and hopped about all over the Province to give hundreds a twenty-minute thrill of a lifetime. To add a further fillip to the fun along the Circuit B fair-string, Pete Derbyshire continued to give parachuting exhibits from Gorman's plane.

They had been right about Red Deer. No other later descent proved quite so nerve-wracking and no exceptionally untoward incident marked his continued wrestling with the law of gravity. Except that at North Battleford his running-shoe-shod feet had the ill luck to come down on painful spikes, and when once he cut himself as well as the rope with the knife he replaced it with a safer scissorlike contraption.

Finally, with Wop May he flew out some fifty-five miles northeast of Edmonton to a huge fairtime celebration at Smoky Lake.

It was a blisteringly hot day in early August and the whole countryside had swarmed to the little town to sample the much-anticipated

attractions. Business was never better for the May-Gorman company. All that blazing day, would-be sky-riders jostled to secure a place in the long line-up awaiting a turn for a spin in the heavens.

Each time, as Wop came in again to land, the uninitiated crowd swept forward, oblivious of the imminent danger.

"Get back, back," roared Pete as he rushed to herd them out of harm's way.

They would scamper back, just in time. Presently Wop was whizzing in again and forward again the mob surged.

It was just too much for Pete, what with the heat, and the unmanageable crowds, and all there was to see to.

"Back, back," he raged, furiously angry.

Presently it was time for the parachute jump.

Until today, except for Red Deer, he hadn't known a qualm. Day after day, in little town and big, he had jumped according to schedule. He had even come to enjoy the fun of it all, and had begun to put on a bit of a show for the fascinated fairgoers, doing such small stunts as lighting one out of a packet of cigarettes high in the air to show them how at ease he was floating through space.

"Sorry, Wop," he told his boss now. "I can't jump today."

"But you'll have to," insisted Wop. "We've got a contract."

"No. I can't make it, not today. I'm all in. Tomorrow I'll jump, any time you like. But not today."

He didn't jump. Next day, he picked up a newspaper. On the front page was blazoned the account of the tragic death of Ormer Locklear and Milton Elliott. Pete Derbyshire never jumped again.

One other enterprising jaunt Wop and Pete undertook that late summer. Again it was a trail-blazer, adding astonishing achievement to the logbook of the modest young pair and the sturdy old *City of Edmonton*.

At day's dawn of August 19, Wop steered the ship from the St. Albert trail harbour up into the western sky. He set a course for White Court, a small "bush" settlement strategically situated, a hundred miles west and a little north, at the edge of a vast timber belt.

This time, Wop's ultimate destination was the widespreading Peace River country, where pioneers of the last great northwest would get their first glimpse of an aeroplane and enjoy, he hoped, their first sky-ride.

Between White Court and Grande Prairie, which was to be his first stop in the land of the Peace, sprawled a two-hundred-mile stretch of desolate densely-forested country that was later to earn the fearsome name of "aeroplane's graveyard."

To serve as a guide over this wilderness, and perhaps to play the role of life-saver if they were forced down, Wop took along as passenger Lieutenant-Colonel George McLeod. A vice-president of the May-Gorman Company, Colonel McLeod was an experienced surveyor with first-hand knowledge of the wide wasteland that was about to ring forth its first echo of a thrumming air-engine.

In its beginning and middle stages, this sky-première was completely successful. Almost on schedule, Wop landed at Grande Prairie. There he was met by Mechanic Pete, who had come by train.

Immediately they hustled to work. Wop stunted for the fairtime crowds, answered the thousand questions of the hundreds seeing their first aeroplane, and carried aloft all the venturesome who were able to scrape from their pants pockets sufficient to pay the fare.

"May is the busiest man in the country," a report was flashed back to Edmonton. "On Friday and Saturday at the fair, he didn't even get time for dinner until night had closed in, so large were the crowds waiting a turn to ride."

Folks who had, five years back, jogged for tedious weeks behind ox and horse to reach this new homeland in the Peace, now sampled the thrill of racing above it at a mile a minute. No doubt about it, the aeroplane was the only vehicle in which to get around, the only vehicle that could laugh at the vast northern distances.

In gorgeous summer weather, Wop hopped next, with historian Agnes Laut as passenger, across to Peace River town. There he manoeuvred the machine down cautiously toward the river bed. Skirting hazardous boulders, he finally brought her to a stop on a comparatively level swatch of gravel and sand opposite the Mounted Police Barracks.

After six busy weeks in the northern centre, Pete gave the *Edmonton* an extra-thorough oiling and overhauling. Already the September frosts were beginning to brush the poplars with gold and it was high time to head homeward.

Using their compass to guide them over the rugged landmark-lacking area between Grande Prairie and White Court, they had covered some two-thirds of the home stretch when the Jenny devel-

oped engine trouble. Luck rode with them as they discovered, in this moment of emergency over the thickly-timbered area, a smallish clearing in the bush.

Mustering all his skill, somehow Wop got the machine down. In spite of his utmost care, as he touched ground her underparts scraped horribly against the encroaching brush. Wildly she bumped over the uneven earth face.

The pair tumbled out, checked the damage and assessed their position. They were, they estimated, perhaps thirty miles out from White Court and about three miles south of the Athabasca River, which they had seen from the air.

The *Edmonton* was in no shape to go on even if it were possible to get her out of this hole in the bush. Her engine was balky, her radiator brackets had broken away allowing the "rad" to leak, and she was pretty badly bruised from coming down on the inhospitable terrain.

With them they had a small quantity of emergency rations, a hatchet, and a luger pistol. Forlornly edging the small clearing was a tiny deserted and dilapidated cabin. In it they found a can with flour that the mice had been unable to enjoy.

Their best bet, they decided first, lay in trying to walk out to the river.

"Let's make for the Athabasca early in the morning," planned Wop.

If they could once reach the river, they might be able to shape a floatable raft on which they could cruise down stream to White Court. Or they might encounter some woodsman or Indian paddling its lonely stretches. At worst, they could surely scramble along its bank to some remote settlement.

That night, they dined on a bit of the bacon they had with them and flapjacks Wop made from the flour. Then they huddled under the plane to get some sleep.

Next morning, loaded down with all the movable equipment they could carry, they started tramping. Soon, with each laboured step, they were sinking deeper and deeper into the quagmirish muskeg. Furthermore, what with their frantic zigzagging to fight their way out of it, they were becoming hopelessly lost in this bush-overgrown wilderness.

"No use," grunted Wop at last. "We'd better get back to the plane."

"Mebbe we can patch her up," hopefully offered Pete.

Back they stumbled to the *Edmonton*.

For three successive suns, they remained buried deep in their wilderness camp. They were much too busy to be lonely. That first day, they toiled over the Jenny.

Drawing upon all their resources of mind, material and mechanical skill, eventually they restored her to some kind of flying shape. With wire and tape, they mended and reinforced. With weed seeds, they made a mash to patch the leak in the radiator.

At night, they crept under the plane to protect themselves from the chill of the late September temperature. For meals, they eked out the bit of food and flour with two partridges Wop brought down with the pistol.

When they'd done their very best for the *Edmonton*, they fell to work on the bush. For two whole days they attacked it, chopping out a takeoff strip by lopping down some of the myriad trees, howking out underbrush and then topping off still more trees to give the old girl more than a fifty-fifty chance of getting airborne again.

At last, Pilot May made several trial runs. Now he was satisfied they had a good chance of success. After all, it was a risk they had, sooner or later, to take.

"All right, let's get going."

They got going all right. In rising, the Jenny scraped unavoidably over the crowding jungle of brush. Valiantly she kept chugging away, gaining height in spite of any new injury.

Hopefully, her pilot set a southeasterly course above the menacing forest-cover. The engine responded better and better and presently they found themselves over the little village of Sangudo.

Below them a likely landing spot spread fortuitously. Fuel was running low. Besides, they were anxious to assess the fresh damage done in the takeoff. At least they could scrape away the clinging branches still festooning the undercarriage. Without further mishap, they managed to get down.

Carefully the pair overhauled their twice-wounded war veteran. Once more, restocked with oil and gas, she appeared to be in usable shape.

Again Wop looked speculatively over his slim mechanic. With the dubious condition of the ailing Jenny, even his modest weight might make all the difference. This haven of Sangudo was of course on a "mixed" rail line that eventually got one to Edmonton.

"Maybe, Pete, you'd better take the train."

Pete glanced over the patched-up Jenny. "Yeh. Maybe I'd better," he agreed.



Using his thumb, Pete presently found himself on the next rail engine labouring its way through bush and muskeg to Alberta's capital.

Again, to the unbounded delight of family and friends, Wop finally set the *Edmonton* down once more in the Sporle pasture off the St. Albert trail. With the aid of haywire and hayseed, he had contrived to complete a record-maker round trip of near a thousand miles.

And he had, all unbeknown then in that autumn of 1920, set a pattern of pluck, and an example of ingenuity, that was to become matter-of-course routine for many a later-day Edmonton pilot.

Now that all the frolic of fairtime was well over, pilots May and Gorman and Tailyour were hunting about to grasp next at whatever pitiful shreds of freighting and passenger business they could coax from a general public around Edmonton that was still disappointingly slow to achieve airmindedness.

Then, from almost a thousand miles down north, came the magic word, "Oil."

Long ago, Alexander Mackenzie, and later Sir John Franklin, had noted the presence of oil seepages along the banks of the great river the former had followed to its many-channelled mouthing into the Arctic ocean. In the past few years more than one geological expedition had confirmed their observations.

Following up this earlier spadework, recently employees of the Imperial Oil Company had been quietly making a drill test at a point some forty-five miles down river from the Ft. Norman trading-post.

"A well of undoubted commercial possibility," reported the company's geologist Dr. Theo. Link, and the stampede was started.

Excited citizens rushed to their maps to locate the site of this black-gold find. Again distance defied any but a vague picture of its location. Then they rushed to make arrangements to hie themselves there. At this season, they discovered, it would be probably as easy to reach the rainbow-foot's pot of gold as this oil-pool near the Arctic circle.

True, from Edmonton in the frenzied Klondyke days had dashed northward a mad stream of all sorts of inexperienced tenderfeet with all sorts of impractical devices on which they counted to reach the Yukon. Now there was the implacable barrier of the mounted police "No" to be met.

"Only experienced mushers," a report announced, "who can convince the mounties that they have sufficient skill and equipment, will be permitted to proceed." This new "Klondyke trail" to the north was not to be strewn with the bleaching bones of the foolhardy.

So the majority were dismayed to learn that they would have to wait until late the next spring to go do their claim-staking. Then they could travel by rail to Peace River or to Athabasca or to Waterways. From one of these points they could begin the patience-shattering water journey north, portaging round falls, creeping by lake and river onward through a land unchanged, except for an occasional tiny trading-post, since those days when it was first sighted by the enterprising explorers.

To Charles Taylor, western development manager for Imperial Oil, came a brilliant inspiration as to how to circumvent all this frustration. As the crow might fly, Fort Norman was only a mere nine hundred miles directly northwest of Edmonton. As trains and boats and truckers manning the portages spun out the way, it was nearly double that distance.

"Why not," Taylor suggested to head office in Toronto, "use aeroplanes to supply men and materials to the new field?"

His idea caught hold. After all, excitement over the find was already continent-wide. Imperial Oil's men should not be among the throngs of johnny-come-latelys who would reach the discovery site by next midsummer. And Edmonton, Taylor advised Toronto, had both airfields and unemployed pilots.

Inquiries were hustled out to plane manufacturers. Presently two purchases were made, and by November, Wop May, George Gorman and Pete Derbyshire were on their way east to familiarize themselves with the machines and to assist in bringing them back to Edmonton.

Procured from aviation enthusiast J. L. Larsen of New York, the planes chosen were two huge war-vintage Junkers that had been transferred to the Allies as part payment of the German war-reparations debt. All-metal all-weather models, they could be fitted with skis, wheels or pontoons.

"Huge corrugated monsters," reports described them, as crowds, whenever they put down along the winter-besieged route to Alberta's capital, collected to inspect them.

Like Mitchell's Alaska Expedition, their pilots, May and Gorman, assisted by Lieutenant Dick Myers of the Larsen Company, took off from the air base at Mineola on Long Island. Unlike those plucky

pioneers, these Edmonton flyers were about to attempt their cross-continent hop when the vagaries of winter might offer a dozen new thwarting obstacles.

All went fairly well until they reached Virden in Manitoba. There they sat down to await better weather. It was mild, all temperatures being well above zero, but all across the western prairies a blinding snow was falling.

On Tuesday, January 4, they decided to push forward. Visibility was still poor and Gorman, in taking off, damaged his gigantic ship on a fence. May, accompanied by Myers, proceeded. A fresh danger now arose.

"The plane was flown the three hundred miles from Virden to Saskatoon at an altitude of not more than six hundred feet because of thick fog," a news dispatch reported of May's flight.

Next day the weather report was still "part cloudy and mild in the Prairie Provinces with light snow." Despite icing troubles and problems in getting oiled up, May and his party took off at noon from Saskatoon with a brisk tail wind behind them. Soon the wind veered about and they were heading right into it.

Exposed in his forward seat to the full biting fury of it, Wop coaxed her utmost from the German giant.

For the last hour, he said when they came down, "I was pushing all I could, trying to help along." Dark was closing in as he finally made the ground at the May-Gorman aerodrome.

The first pioneering sky-step of an oilman's dream had been taken. At least Imperial men should now be able to thumb their noses at Arctic distances.

A few days later those who'd been lucky enough to secure reservations in summer steamers to go down the Mackenzie and those who still frantically sought some way to reach the northern treasure-store popped their eyes to read the seven-column headline bannering the front page of the *Edmonton Bulletin*: "32-Passenger Airship to Run Edmonton-Norman Oil Fields."

"Plans are afoot," the report beneath the headline read, "to put into operation from Edmonton to Fort Norman a huge dirigible capable of carrying thirty-two passengers and five tons of freight. Captain E. L. Janney of Vancouver and Major Woolan of Los Angeles are to select sites for the aerodromes. The dirigible is already under order, and they hope to operate by March."

A week later, while the German Junkers was being hurriedly fitted with skis out at the May hangar, Captain Janney arrived to select the first site. His company, the Northern Canada Traders, had already, he announced, obtained a Dominion charter.

Then on Monday, January the 24th, the second Junkers, piloted by Lieutenant Myers and Gorman with Mechanics Derbyshire of Edmonton and Buehl of the American Air Service, limped into Saskatoon with a leaking radiator.

When fresh repairs were at last effected, the big machine was all ready to atone for past misbehaviours. Leaving Saskatoon on the 26th, she breezed easily forward. Following the Grand Trunk rail line westward to Edmonton, she reached the city within two and a half hours from takeoff time.

Friskily the great Junkers circled above the capital. Over the city hall she looped the loop and presently settled politely down at the aerodrome.

"We had good wind and weather all the way," the men reported. "It was quite remarkable."

Imperial's chances to bring Norman oil to Edmonton's back door were surely doubled now.

Then, next day, on January 28, another headline dashed all the bright get-rich-quick dreams. It read: "Government suspends granting of oil leases."

Stubbornly Captain Janney announced, "We are going ahead with our plans. A flying service such as we plan can be used to great advantage anyway, no matter what the action of the government may be."

An air harbour was being established, he said, on the D. W. Warner farm at Clover Bar, outside Edmonton's eastern outskirts. He was now negotiating with the government of Newfoundland for the purchase of two dirigibles. He also planned to bring immediately to Alberta's capital no less than seven aeroplanes.

Over in the northwest corner of the city, at the May-Gorman aerodrome, the hum of the 175-horsepower engines in the giant Junkers monoplanes ripped through the frosty air. Freshly fitted with skis, the machines were being thoroughly tested for takeoff and landing on their new foot-gear. Presently they flew the half dozen miles across to Big Lake to repeat the trials on the kind of frozen surface they might expect to find in the northland.

By mid-February the government announced a revamped plan of oil-leasing regulations. Pronounced "generous" by those concerned, these kindled a fresh fire of enthusiasm for northbound travel.

And four miles beyond Peace River town, at the junction of the Peace and the Smoky, an aerodrome was being hastily prepared to serve as operations base for Imperial Oil's Junkers.

When at last all was in readiness to transfer the two planes to this new field, the snow had all vanished from Edmonton and Peace River.

So, once more equipped with wheels and carrying between them seven men and one thousand pounds of freight, the Junkers rose at noon on Sunday, February 27, from the tawny grassfield by the St. Albert trail.

Lieutenant Gorman piloted the machine now christened the *Rene* and Captain Elmer Fullerton replaced Wop May at the stick of the other, now named the *Vic*. Wop was already engrossed in new private plans involving his own aeroplane company.

This first northerly jump of the Junkers toward their far goal was happily uneventful. At three o'clock that same afternoon they touched down at the base by the celebrated Peace River Junction, where Mackenzie and Twelve-foot Davis and many another map-maker and fortune-hunter had lingered.

In fact, two history-making paths were thus crossing here now. Their landing-spot was only a few hundred yards from the camp-site where Mackenzie wintered in 1792-93, preparing for his famous overland trip to the Pacific.

Beyond this last viewpoint brushed by civilization, there threaded northward a straggling string of small settlements dotting the prairie flanking the Peace. Beyond these were sprinkled the few tiny trading-posts that edged the Mackenzie River system. Otherwise, this vast apron of silent space lay unaltered since Mackenzie's passing.

Should a plane be forced down anywhere in this area, no telegraph or wireless would stutter out word of its whereabouts. So, in readiness for any such eventuality, two dozen homing pigeons cooed in their new home at the Peace River air base, ready to ride north with the monster metal birds.

Next, it was decided, a fuel cache should be established at the Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Upper Hay River, a point about 200 miles north of Peace River town and midway between the latter town and Great Slave Lake. So, in preparation for this chore,

which would mean the invasion of a land still gripped fast by winter, the skis were popped on again and everything was carefully checked and rechecked.

Each carrying 1000 pounds of gasoline, the two planes set forth on the preliminary skirmish against the sub-Arctic. Without too much trouble they presently found themselves above the Upper Hay River post. Successfully they got down on the river ice.

As they unloaded their barrels onto the ice, recalled Fullerton, "a few Indians with rifles began to assemble a short distance away. They viewed us with undisguised awe and wonderment not unmixed with suspicion, and they showed a definite disinclination to come close to us or the aeroplanes."

Soon, by arrangement with the post factor, a dog-team and sleigh were transporting the gas and oil to a suitable storage spot and the men hustled to get airborne southward again. Without incident they taxied safely in once more to the base at Peace River.

"Except that," said Fullerton, "we found several small holes in the fuselage of one plane near its tail . . . apparently bullet holes. It was fairly obvious that one or more of the Indians had fired at us as we passed over them, thinking perhaps we were some kind of large bird. Fortunately, no other damage was done and the holes were soon repaired."

Two days later, on March 24, according to Fullerton "a bright promising morning," their first ambitious invasion proper into the sub-Arctic began. They were to make their final dash, to Fort Norman, four hundred and fifty miles beyond the fuel-cache they had established at the Upper Hay River post. At nine o'clock they quitted the aerodrome at the junction of the Peace and the Smoky, and vanished once more into the northern sky.

This time, the party consisted of Pilots Fullerton and Gorman, Mechanics Derbyshire and William Hill, Imperial Oil employee W. Waddell and Sergeant "Nitchie" Thorne of the Mounted Police.

Little dreaming of the perils presently confronting the Junkers' crews, back in Edmonton a horde of would-be oil-claim stakers were delighted to learn that still another corporation planned to establish a flying route to Fort Norman.

"My company plans to operate an air line to the north," announced a new visitor to the city.

The speaker, Pilot R. A. Ritchie, was already a veteran of world flyways who had flown in France, China, Siam and Russia as well as



in Canada. For the projected northern line, this young man had something quite different to suggest. "We propose," he said, "to use British seaplanes of the PH 4-1 type for both passengers and freight."

Skyways from Edmonton to the great Norman Field soon promised to be thoroughly crowded. At the first of April, J. L. Larsen himself, the New York plane agent and manufacturer, arrived at the May-Gorman airfield in a third all-metal Junkers piloted by Lieutenant Myers.

"The company plans to establish a fleet of three planes for northern transportation," stated Mr. Larsen as he hurried, four days later, to take off with his pilot for the Imperial Oil hangar at Peace River. "An air route is the logical way to the northern field."

Already he anticipated one of the most serious obstacles to be encountered. "There's not yet a sufficient store of gasoline in the north. We had hoped to have native gasoline distilled at the Fort Norman well, but Imperial Oil hasn't yet got the temporary plant under way." So Larsen's plans included the shipping of enormous caches of fuel.

A slight slip-up in the midst of all his grandiose schemes put a temporary check to his activities. At Peace River he was temporarily grounded by authority of the Canadian Air Board. All aviators flying in Canada must now register. Mr. Larsen, when crossing the border, had overlooked this detail.

Then a black cloud rolled suddenly in to sadden all the sky-minded oil-fevered folk of Edmonton.

The bleak news arrived on April 12. Captain Keith Tailyour, who had temporarily quitted his post with Jock McNeill's Airplane Company to do a turn of instructing at Camp Borden and whose flying feats had thrilled thousands of Albertans, had been killed in an air accident at the training camp.

Nonetheless, the air-oil flurry persisted. Calgary's celebrated Captain Freddie McCall came to help with some of the grand plans. Sparked by the unbounded faith in the north of Colonel J. K. Cornwall, the man known as Peace River Jim, a new Northern Development Company was being shaped. It would buy out the wobbly May-Gorman outfit, using its already-established facilities.

"We are going to use three six-passenger flying boats," officials of the new company announced, "of the type known as American Navy Coast Patrol boats, equipped with 400 h.p. Liberty engines."

Wop, it was disclosed, was already in the east studying these



planes. Of them, one was already in use in northern work, doing aerial surveying between Toronto and Hudson Bay.

"One plane will ply between Peace River and Great Slave Lake, and a second will fly between Great Slave and Fort Norman, while the third will be held in reserve."

Still sealed in the voiceless north was the fate of the two pioneering planes blazing the trail to the oilfield.

All the while visions of skyways dotted like wild geese with aeroplanes were being dreamed in Edmonton. Rivalry blossomed between local and "foreign" promoters who brought forth continued rosy reports that "the world's greatest oilfield" was about to be exploited. Gloomy Guses who couldn't see the great oil-air age dawning at the city's back door and who could talk of nothing but flat postwar prices and pancaked markets were scoffed at as the greyest of wet blankets.

"We know the aeroplane will finally take the place of the train," insisted Captain McCall as he prodded local pessimists. "Why leave it to outsiders for its introduction here?"

Meanwhile Outsider Larsen hopped back from Peace River to continue his skimming of the cream from the coming air business. With him came a man who could speak with the weight of a great northern flying experience already behind him.

Flying in the *Vic*, Lieutenant Gorman had arrived back, with Captain Fullerton, on April 25th at Peace River. Coming down at Fort Simpson, the *Rene* had suffered serious injury. Now her pilot returned to Edmonton with the American Larsen to arrange for repairs to the machine.

After duly reporting to his employers, Gorman gave a public account of his and Fullerton's initial flight into the sub-Arctic that must have instantly grounded many a sky-minded dream of reaching, within a few hours, the fabulous oil-field.

"We encountered all the vicissitudes," Gorman related.

"We left Peace River Crossing at nine a.m. on March 24. Ninety miles downstream, we encountered a blizzard. We bucked into the storm, coming down to five hundred feet to distinguish the landmarks through the murk. Two hundred miles from Peace River Crossing, we spotted Fort Vermilion. We came down on a pasture in two feet of snow in the howling blizzard."

There they safely anchored their ships, the *Vic* and the *Rene*. For two days they waited out the severe storm.

Trying again on Sunday, March 27, they flew northwesterly to Hay River and reached Hay River Harbour on Great Slave Lake at 4.30 in the afternoon. Twenty-five hundred feet below them had extended one of the great scenic sights of North America, the spectacularly-frozen gigantic Alexandra and Louise falls on the Hay River.

"We took off Monday at two o'clock, and an hour later were again bucking a terrific head wind with a blizzard. We were forced to land on the Mackenzie River twenty miles above Providence, coming down successfully on skis in the storm. In an hour the blizzard had blown past and we went on northwest to Providence."

Waiting for good weather, on the 30th of the month they finally rose again from the river, winging northwestward in 103 minutes over the 140 miles of snow-and-ice-hidden Mackenzie to Fort Simpson. Here, possibly at the suggestion of his passenger Sergeant Thorne of the Mounted Police, who was catching a quick ride back to his post after having brought out an Eskimo prisoner to be tried for murder, Gorman came down on the high ice-crusting field right by the home barracks of the mountie. Tottering forward through the deep ice-barbed snow, the *Rene* suffered severe damage. Putting down in the same field, Fullerton in the *Vic* had the good luck to land safely, settling into snow almost up to his machine's fuselage.

A mile to the south, the visitors were informed, was a smooth subsidiary channel or snye much better suited to landing and takeoff, the river itself being so ice-ridged that it was completely unsafe. So, presently, with her load removed, Fullerton transferred the *Vic* over to this snow-shod snye.

Again bad luck intruded. The *Vic's* engine had now become so fractious that it was obvious they couldn't go on until it had had a complete overhaul.

So from the *Vic* the propeller and a ski were transferred to the damaged *Rene* and Mechanics Hill and Derbyshire hurried to make the *Rene* thoroughly airworthy again. Indian Agent Harris donated a disused boiler and from it they stripped the metal tubes to fashion strengthening braces for the skis.

Then Gorman attempted to lift his machine from the ice-locked field. Bad luck still rode with him. Once more the *Rene* nosed sulkily down, smashing the second propeller.

Alas, the entire party was now hopelessly grounded.

What was more, they were nearly a thousand miles beyond the end of a telegraph line. There was no way at all to send out word of their plight.

"As it was now April," Fullerton was later to recall, "this would mean that the five of us would simply have to twiddle our thumbs at Simpson for nearly five months, until a new propeller arrived by boat from Peace River in August."

What happened next has become a noted northern legend. The men set to work to shape a brand-new propeller from oak sleigh boards donated by the Catholic Mission, using large clamps and moosehide glue furnished from the same source.

"Like drowning men grasping at a straw," said Fullerton afterward, "we reviewed again the almost preposterous idea of constructing a propeller. Gradually we came to the conclusion that it would not be an altogether impossible feat.

"Our mechanic, Bill Hill, was the leading light in the enterprise. In fairness to him, he deserves the lion's share of the credit for the success that the propeller turned out to be."

Walter Johnson, a Hudson's Bay steamboat engineer and a former cabinetmaker "rendered much valuable assistance," as did, added Fullerton, "Father Decoux, all the mission staff and the people of Fort Simpson."

While the men laboured so that the *Vic* could again be airborne, the Mission's ox-team hauled the broken *Rene* over to the island near the snye. There it would have to await a summer boat bringing new under parts, floats and another propeller.

Meanwhile a traveller arriving by dog-team from Fort Norman, 300 miles beyond, brought word that Imperial Oil men stationed there had been unable as yet to distil precious gasoline from the new well. There were seventy-five gallons only left at Simpson.

So, when Fullerton had tested the new home-shaped propeller and found it airworthy on the *Vic*, the party piled into the machine and began to race the spring river break-up back south toward the base at Peace River Crossing. Derbyshire remained behind to guard and to begin repairs on the twice-damaged *Rene*.

"We followed the sixth meridian south," Gorman continued. "Cut through the bush the entire length of the Province, it's an unmistakable landmark."

Summing up their experiences during their first venturing into the

vast sub-Arctic unknown, the pilot advocated pontoons for summer flight.

"Wheels on a machine in summer aren't feasible. There's no suitable landing spot. You can make safe water landings, there are so many lakes and rivers. Pontoons," he said, "are now being added to the *Vic*."

And presently, in the pontoon-shod *Rene*, Gorman was to have his very closest shave of all with death.

While he hustled to get together the necessary equipment needed for the injured *Rene*, plane-manufacturer-salesman Larsen continued to shape elaborate plans for Edmonton's air age.

With his pilot dead and his Avro lying idle all spring in the Portage Avenue aerodrome, President Jock McNeill was glad to talk business with the enterprising New Yorker.

"The Edmonton Airplane Company," baldly announced the *Bulletin* of May 12, "has turned over its aeroplane, its hangar and the lease of the grounds just off Portage to J. L. Larsen."

Before rushing back to New York reportedly to bring still another Junkers west, Larsen took another forward step in his grand scheme by arranging for a seaplane base fifteen miles east of Edmonton at Cooking Lake. At Peace River his company began to accumulate a huge flotilla of scows, power and paddling canoes and launches.

"The boats," it was announced, "are to be used as tender for aircraft once they arrive. The all-metal Larsen planes are to be assembled in Edmonton, where a marine engine plant will be established. It is expected the entire flyer will be manufactured here after a time."

Packing along a spare propeller and the wheels for the *Rene*, at the end of May, Captain Fullerton lifted the pontoon-footed *Vic* from the Peace aerodrome. Once more he headed north. With him ventured Imperial Oil's Geologist Link and Surveyor Waddell.

Once it was made airworthy again, the *Rene* was to be flown to Vermilion Chutes and there also equipped with pontoons. Both planes then, it was still planned, would be ready for summer transferring of men and materials at least as far as Fort Simpson. A regular route to Norman might have to wait until the gusher's oil could be distilled there in a temporary plant.

Making, on June 2nd, a final jump to Fort Norman, the *Vic* smashed a pontoon in coming down on the great river. With a small scow supplanting the pontoon, the giant machine was presently guided the forty-five miles downstream right to the site of the famed Discovery well.

It was August before the *Vic* was again restored to fine flying fettle. Then one day before turning southward, Fullerton took Link and Waddell up for a brief spin. In one hour, he flew over the entire projected oilfield, a jaunt that had taken the geologist the whole previous summer to complete by foot and canoe.

Out of the dreary drizzle that dribbled down on Peace River town on August 24th of that year 1921, two giant silver birds, suddenly shining against the grey cloud masses, roused the torpid town to life. It was the *Vic* and the *Rene*, coming home to roost.

Cautiously they circled about, seeking a safe landing-spot on the mighty Peace. As was the custom, Gorman came down first. This time the ever-unlucky *Rene* struck an invisible sandbar, smashing to smithereens one of her pontoons. Swept downstream by the swift current, the crippled plane overturned and the luckless occupants, Pilot Gorman, Mechanic Hill and Newswriter C. A. Bloom, were in imminent danger of drowning.

"Only one wing and the undamaged pontoon showed above water," Derbyshire reported later, as with Fullerton in the *Vic* he watched the near-tragedy from the air. "Then we saw the men crawl out on the wing."

A fast-moving launch overtook the fleeing aeroplane and rescued her passengers. The runaway *Rene* was finally salvaged from the watery resting-place where a gravel bar had stopped her downstream race. Never again did she take to the air.

Imperial Oil was through, for the time being at any rate, with further flying to oil fields. Likewise, with the speed of bursting balloons, all the other grand schemes for establishing flight routes from Edmonton into the north collapsed completely. True, the usefulness of the aeroplane had been thoroughly demonstrated. Equally vividly had the drawbacks.

As for the oil boom, claim-seekers had begun to limp homeward from the north, with spent energies and spent pocketbooks. Six

hundred thousand acres of oil claims had been staked in one season in the Canadian northwest.

Sure, the oil was probably there all right. But experience had just taught that the difficulties and the costs of transportation were staggering. Only Imperial Oil and one or two other concerns stayed quietly with the game, shipping supplies and equipment to Norman by boat and barge.

The great air-oil age that promised to blossom wide in Edmonton that summer of 1921 had withered away. Only the future could tell if from the shrivelled roots would spring a fresh and more robust flowering.

Obviously, commercial aeronautics was hopelessly doomed. Wop May and George Gorman, like all the other former war-pilots, were going to have to find other means of livelihood.

"The boys saw the possibilities of flying," sadly concluded Wop's mother. "But it was too soon. The public wasn't ready for aviation."

Gorman headed for Oakland, California, where he engaged in the lumber business. Elmer Fullerton went back to the Canadian Air Force. Offering employment to a few was the latter's station established in 1920 at Morley in southern Alberta. It was literally blown by the wind to a new base, the following year, at High River. Punch Dickins had a job with the forestry patrol, later transferring also to the C.A.F. Jimmy Bell was still busy with soldier's re-establishment. And so it went.

They could all dream of a Canadian northwest dotted with great commercial air harbours. Meanwhile they must eat.

Only Wop May continued to scheme as well as to dream. Though temporarily he was being forced to accept work as a salesman, while the weeds and the grass grew tall again over Edmonton's air harbours he planned and probed and prodded.

Presently his stubborn persistence was to have the weeds mowed and to bear fruit that a then-indifferent citizenry would pluck far into the future.

One stalwart civilian there had been, that dismal year of 1921, quite ready to demonstrate his faith in air travel. Old-timer Kenny Blatchford, afterward mayor of Alberta's capital and then federal member of parliament, claimed a spot of honour for himself in aeronautical records.



"I was the first civilian to fly from Edmonton to Chicago," he reminded the folks later on.

When, early in the summer, Lieutenant Myers had piloted J. L. Larsen and his Junkers back to New York, Blatchford caught a ride in the machine.

"There was one funny thing happened, and I've always," he confessed, "been afraid of being arrested for it."

The Americans, he disclosed afterward, wanted to pack some sturdy Canadian liquor back to their friends in prohibition-restricted United States. They piled a few bottles into the aeroplane, but they were afraid they couldn't spirit them past the curious customs officers.

"I devised a way for them," sheepishly admitted Edmonton's Kenny. "One of the big tires on the landing wheels had burst. So they took off both wheels and replaced them with a pair of lighter ones. We put the bottles in the big tires and we got through fine."

By the autumn of 1921, New Yorker Larsen had lost all interest in Edmonton's air age. So his customer company, Imperial Oil, took over the Edmonton Airplane Company's lease and the veteran *Vic* had a temporary resting-place on the Hagmann airfield. Presently the oilmen found a buyer for the machine in the Railwaymen's Industrial and Investment Company, whose president was Lin Bell of Edmonton.

This new group, report said, "is to operate a seaplane service from Hazelton, B.C., to big game and fur trapping districts in the mountains."

Come spring, sturdy hands shoved the old *Vic* out of the tiny aerodrome where she'd hibernated for some six months. Pete Derbyshire oiled and greased her and hooked on again her great silver wings. Then Major Tommy Thompson guided her over range upon range of mountain mass to Hazelton.

Here, in this primeval land, carrying hunters and prospectors, she faced as grim testing as anything she had known in the valley of the Mackenzie.

Her former pilot, Captain Fullerton, went on, too, to pile fresh adventure upon an already auspicious air record. His name made news again, that same spring of 1922. On May 30 his friends, remem-

bering so many ill-fated polar expeditions, shivered to read, "Captain Elmer Fullerton, Edmonton airman recently flying a seaplane for dominion government harbour operations at Jericho Beach, has accepted a job to pilot one of the Junkers Captain Amundsen is taking on a North Pole flight."

On June 2 the Roald Amundsen expedition set sail from Seattle in the *Maud* with two aeroplanes aboard. The larger was the Junkers which Fullerton was to fly over the pole-cap, and the smaller an Oriole to be used for scouting. Accompanying Amundsen, the pioneer of the South Pole, and his Canadian pilot Fullerton were three Norwegians, Co-pilot Umdahl and two mechanics.

"We reached the small Eskimo settlement and trading-post at Kotzebue," Fullerton afterward related. This Kotzebue was midway between Nome, Alaska, and Point Barrow, the most northerly point of North America.

"Due to the solid and impassable ice conditions we now encountered, the *Maud* could proceed no farther north. So we put the Junker ashore with Umdahl and the two mechanics. They were to get the aircraft ready for flight and to arrange, with the assistance of natives, for a suitable takeoff strip. Amundsen and I proceeded on the *Maud* across the Bering Strait to the Siberian shore, where we were to obtain some special Eskimo clothing which Amundsen preferred for us to wear on the transpolar flight.

"On our return to Kotzebue a couple of days later, we found that, following a test flight, Pilot Umdahl had had a landing mishap which badly damaged the machine. This meant that the entire project had to be cancelled for that year."

Thus did Amundsen have to give up his great dream of being first to fly over the North Pole.

Fullerton returned to the Canadian Air Force and the determined explorer went home to Norway. He had decided next to try to make the flight by means of an airship. This, in company with the Italian, Count Nobile, he finally succeeded in doing. In 1928 he was to lose his life attempting to rescue another Nobile expedition which had been forced down on the polar wastes.

Back in his home town, Wop May also was still tasting the bitterness of a great dream collapsing. Even the sturdy old *City of Edmonton* was in bad shape. Finally a discouraged Wop had turned

her back to her owners, the people of Edmonton, and she was stowed away in a horse barn at the Exhibition Grounds.

"Cost of renovation," said an official report in 1923, "to bring the plane back to regulation flying standards, would be more than could be justifiably expended upon her."

Search as he might, Wop could find no one both willing and able to lend substantial financial support to his sky-riding schemes. Until, in the spring of 1924, a visionary Grande Prairie farmer evolved, with his help, an elaborate new aerial plan for Edmonton and her hinterland.

## 1924-1927

"THE BEAT of a plane engine," nostalgically beamed a reporter, "is to be heard again over Edmonton."

Instantly citizens guessed that, if there were a new plan afoot to institute afresh some kind of local air service, Wop May's persistent dream must have helped to shape it.

They were right. In L. Harry Adair, a well-to-do Grand Prairie farmer, at last Wop found a visionary who shared his aerial convictions and who was able financially to give them tangible shape.

Down in San Diego, Adair bought himself a spanking new Curtiss Jenny and late in May of 1924, with an American piloting it, he proudly set the machine down at the international border.

Here Wop took over the controls and as proudly flew it to Edmonton. Soon he was up to the ears in the work he loved, flying an aeroplane in the crystal prairie skies, tending her with loving care while she rested on the ground, answering all the questions of eager customers who flocked to admire her elegant new lines and to await their turn for a gay jaunt up-sky.

This new Jenny, Wop was quick to point out, was equipped with a one-hundred-and-eighty horse-power Hispano motor and had a proven top speed of eighty-two and a half miles per hour. Furthermore, she should be able to fly nonstop the tremendous distance of three hundred and thirty miles, for she had a maximum gas-carrying capacity sufficient to last for four hours.

"She sails through the air," Wop joyfully announced, "as steadily as a big sedan rolling over concrete pavement."

"Air routes in a dozen or fifteen years," predicted her owner, Harry Adair, "will practically eliminate rail travel."

For a while that June, his prophetic words were weighted with actual hard cash, as he found to his delight that "Edmontonites are keen flyers."

Two precious weeks had then to be lost, however, while the Jenny got a thorough overhauling in readiness for her next undertaking.

She was to make the long hop over the bush wilderness sprawling between the city and the Peace River district. There she was to join the First of July celebrations at Grande Prairie and then to do "barn-storming" at the summer fairs in that area, skipping back to Calgary in time for the Stampede and to headquarters at Edmonton for the summer fair.

"Eventually," recalled Mrs. Adair afterward, "Harry planned to fly north and buy up furs." To put the new air business on a proper basis, at this time also Mr. Adair made due application to register his new company, which was to be capitalized at \$20,000 and to have headquarters in the city of Edmonton.

Meanwhile, too, he and Wop cast a calculating eye toward the future. To be ready for the inevitable development they so confidently foresaw, the city itself, they urged, should own its own air harbour.

This plea for Edmonton to provide a municipally owned aerodrome was not completely new to the civic council's ears. As far back as April of 1920, Lieutenant Colonel J. S. Scott, supervisor of licences for the newly-formed Canada Air Board, together with Major L. S. Breadner and Captain F. R. Smith, comprised a delegation which waited upon Mayor Joe Clarke asking that landing-space be set aside.

"Eight thousand square yards in a circle," the supervisor told the Mayor at that time, "is all that is needed."

Colonel Scott envisioned an air route belting Canada from coast to coast, and mail and mounted police regularly transported by plane.

Moreover, after the new government order-in-council was to become effective on May 17 of that same year of 1920, no licensed pilot would be permitted to land at any point where no aerodrome was to be found. Hence the pressing need for municipally-furnished air harbours.

With the next spring's several schemes for providing air service to the new northern Discovery well, Edmonton was named headquarters for the western representative of the new Air Board. Arriving to fill the post, Captain A. G. Goulding saw the rosier of prospects in view.

"Air flying is making great progress in the west," he summed up, "there now being about forty machines at different points between the Great Lakes and the coast, and Edmonton is looked upon as a coming aviation centre."

Though one by one all the private flying projects of 1921 folded dismally, the federal government persisted in maintaining its modest fleet of planes and in carrying on survey, patrol and photographic work. Leases on Edmonton's two privately operated aerodromes lapsed, and these government planes, when operating over the city and district, were forced to come down at points outside.

Now in June of 1924, Wop May and Harry Adair appeared before Edmonton's Mayor Kenny Blatchford to petition for land to be set aside for a permanent airfield.

To be prepared for the great air traffic they anticipated, the city, they urged, should possess its very own air harbour. What better location, they argued, than the former airfield of the Edmonton Airplane Company?

This little patch of former Hagmann farmland, which had come into the possession of the city for non-payment of taxes, was still as desirable as when Jock McNeill and Keith Tailyour had selected it. It was still strategically located, still flanked on all sides by comparatively level empty land and still edged, of course, by the broad almost-unused strip of pavement on Portage Avenue.

"Two blocks in the old Hagmann estate," their petition modestly requested, "should be reserved and cleared as a landing-station."

The city, they pointed out, was lamentably lacking in a good landing-field. Government planes doing survey work in the area, they reminded officials, were forced to put down out at Fort Saskatchewan or even farther out at Vegreville.

This same lamentable lack of sufficient takeoff space soon brought disaster to the new Edmonton and Grande Prairie Aircraft Company.

Having thoroughly overhauled the shining pride of the infant association, in late June, Wop set off for the region he had first visited with the Jenny *Edmonton* in 1920.

Attempting on June 26 to rise at Grande Prairie, Wop was unable to lift the heavily-loaded plane over the low-strung telephone wires. Out of control, the new Jenny crashed into a building, incurring severe damage. Luckily, the three occupants, Pilot May, Mr. Adair, and their passenger, a fur-dealer named Harry Barr of Hudson Hope, clambered out unhurt.

It was the same old story, with the same unhappy ending. But with one sequel that was presently to mushroom forth into a new history-making epoch for the frontier capital of Alberta and to bring the beginnings of fulfilment to the sky dreams of many a grounded war-age ace.



"The accident at Grande Prairie," quickly concluded Mayor Blatchford, "is forceful evidence of the need of suitable landing-ground." Reminding citizens how Wop had begged for that same thing within Edmonton's boundaries, he now issued instructions to S. B. Ferris of the city land department to report on the site desired by the young pilot.

"I experienced a feeling of comfort," recollected the flying-enthusiast mayor as he recalled his own early adventures in the air, "in knowing that a good landing-field was available for descents."

Meantime, dispatches announcing a globe-girdling air race between Britain and the United States pinpointed the attention of residents to the air-harbour problem. These news flashes offered, especially to the visionaries, a definite inkling of the future. They suggested that their city might well become a sort of air-Plymouth in a new age of round-the-world voyaging.

Captain Stuart MacLaren, the British contender for first round-the-world flying honours, was to cross Canada on his homeward lap. He planned to bring his amphibian plane down outside the city, on the picturesque Lake Wabamun into whose waters Wop May had dipped the Jenny *Edmonton* five years before.

To mark the occasion fittingly, Mayor Blatchford arranged for a welcoming party to go out and extend good wishes to the daring Captain MacLaren. Thus did the almost unknown farming community suddenly begin to savour its very first taste of enjoying the spotlight as a focal point on a world thoroughfare.

Great was the disappointment when a final dispatch flashed word that the brave aviator, after conquering 12,000 air miles, was forced to abandon his flight following a crash off the Siberian coast.

For the far-seeing few, this disappointment was tempered by the certain conviction that their city inevitably lay on the great circle route of globe-girdlers of the future.

May's crash, too, meant the abandoning of many splendid plans. For five weeks at Grande Prairie the Jenny was earth-bound, undergoing extensive and expensive repairs, and all her full schedule of flying for the summer exhibitions had to be cancelled.

It was not until early August that she returned to Edmonton to take up again her belated programme of fair following. She swung easterly, with Wop still at the controls, for a brief jaunt along a string of small hamlets scattered across the prairie.

Presently her pilot's persistence bore, within his home town, a perennial local fruit. On October 13 of that same autumn, Wop May and City Engineer Haddow submitted to the civic council a plan of the proposed lay-out of the landing-field. It was the already-designated strip of Hagmann estate on which perched the rough little shed that McNeill and Tailyour had built. Council accepted the recommendation that the land be held as they requested.

With winter approaching, promoter and pilot of the Edmonton and Grande Prairie Aircraft Company had to face cold hard facts. Adverse conditions had prevented the plane from becoming the money-maker they had optimistically foreseen. Indeed her net earnings were insufficient to eke out a living for her pilot and his family, much less to provide wages for a mechanic and any return at all on the investment of her forward-looking owner.

Once more the birds took sole possession of the wide-flung vault above the straggling northern city. Once more her premier aviator was forced to earn his livelihood on solid ground, returning to his employment with a business-machine company.

Some day, he was determined, he would yet find a way to harness circumstances to restore him to the work he loved.

The torch that he had lit was carried forward by Mayor Blatchford, who pressed on with the project for a municipally-owned air-field. Engineer Haddow was authorized to forward to Ottawa an application, along with the required fee of ten dollars, seeking official recognition of the defunct Edmonton Airplane Company's site as a city aerodrome.

"Expenditure of \$400, estimated as cost of preliminary work" for the proposed landing-field was to be made, according to a motion put to a council meeting of May 10 in 1926 by Alderman Kott, seconded by Alderman Gibbs, and carried.

The date was a propitious one in North American air history, for bold headlines on that day's local newspapers bannered triumphant news. In a first heavier-than-air machine, Commander Richard Byrd had succeeded in flying over the north pole. In the keen race for this flying honour, he had beaten such notable rivals as Roald Amundsen, Lincoln Ellsworth and Sir Hubert Wilkins, whose names were presently to be tied with happenings that were to link the city with her sub-polar hinterland.

In mid-June of that year occurred Ottawa's acceptance of Edmonton's leap into the skies. To the latter city was mailed a modest slip of paper bearing the number "1" and reading

LICENSE FOR AIR HARBOUR

This certifies that the City of Edmonton, whose address is Civic Block, c-o A. W. Haddow, City Engineer, is hereby granted a license under the air regulations, 1920, and under the conditions specified overleaf, for the use as a

Public Air Harbour

by day, of the area described as follows

New Hagmann Estate, Summerwilde.

Dated this 16th day of June, 1926.

For the records, way-out-western Edmonton had scored in a manner little heeded at the moment by the rest of the dominion. She was now the proud parent of Canada's first municipal airport. Nor could even her most air-visionary citizens, May and Blatchford and Bell and the others, dream of all the assorted aerial "firsts" and "onlys" she was going to scoop from the sky in the days to come.

"Most of the credit for the airfield here," attested Mayor Kenny Blatchford, "must go to Captain May. He came to council asking that a piece of land be set aside for planes to take off and land on. Men of vision in the council agreed to his request."

Pinpointing attention to the need for immediate work to be done on the new airfield, there flew into the heart of the city a remarkable man with a remarkable machine. It was C. S. "Jack" Caldwell, at the controls of a Vickers Viking biplane.

Pilot Caldwell's home was near the little town of Lacombe, eighty miles south on the Calgary trail, which had seen its first aeroplane eight years before when Katherine Stinson made that brave journey from Calgary to Edmonton. Already Caldwell had piled up a story-book record for himself.

In 1924 he had entered his own small machine in the American "On-to-Dayton Race," the only Canadian to participate. During the next summer, he had been co-pilot and engineer of the monster amphibian he now docked on the North Saskatchewan river in

Edmonton and his job had been to assist in first flights of prospectors in the forbidding mountain regions of northern British Columbia and the Yukon.

Then to Calgary had come a red-hot rumour of a rich field of gold and platinum in the Barrens away to the north and east of Edmonton. So the Dunne Syndicate of that city bought the venturesome Viking and hired the likewise venturesome Pilot Caldwell to carry prospectors and mining engineers and their gear into this otherwise almost inaccessible region.

Early in the spring, the dismantled machine was shipped to Edmonton, where Caldwell and his mechanic, Irenée Vachon, gave it a thorough overhauling. Then they sent it on again by rail, over the meandering "muskeg express" that wound some one hundred and thirty miles northeast of the city to Lac la Biche.

Eventually, from the waters of wide Lac la Biche, they lifted the machine, nicknamed *The Bouncing Bruno*, and in the areas north and east of Great Slave Lake they pioneered in assisting for the search for likely locations of precious minerals.

Word of his arrival now back in the city brought swarms of on-lookers to the river flats to gaze at the wonder machine moored on their muddy Saskatchewan.

"Flying in the Barrens," described the pilot to the scores of questioners who beseged him, "is the most difficult I've ever undertaken." This piloting of an aeroplane in what was then referred to as "Canada's Blind Spot" amounts, he explained, "to flying blind."

There are thousands and thousands of lakes, he continued, and the rolling terrain is devoid of prominent landmarks such as he had to guide him flying the previous year in the Yukon. It's barren, he said, of everything but caribou, water and mosquitoes. During the brief season in the north, he had logged more than 5000 miles.

Greatest sight of all in these sky journeys was, he found, the spectacle of thousands of caribou making their annual southern migration.

So much water had he found that to reduce weight they had removed the land carriage from the amphibian machine.

Excitedly the spectators read the registration letters, G-CAEB, on the monster amphibian, a British-built machine that was the only one of its kind in Canada and which had already seen far more of the broad dominion than they could hope to view within a lifetime.

"Why didn't you land on our landing-grounds off Portage Avenue?" someone in the crowd gathered ashore wanted to know.

"The uneven condition of the ground there," replied Pilot Caldwell, "made landing much too dangerous."

On this visit the aviator added another "first" to his amazing record. From Fort Fitzgerald, a trading-post at the top of Alberta situated on the broad Slave River just before it breaks into its un-navigable stretch of tortured rapids, Pilot Caldwell brought the very first sack of northern air-transported mail.

After another check of the stalwart engine of his *Bouncing Bruno*, the visitor lifted her from the waters of the North Saskatchewan. West of Lacombe, they dropped down to the placid Gull Lake, along whose shore the pilot's parents operated a farm. From there they soared southward again to the R.C.A.F. station at High River, where properly levelled ground enabled him to put the amphibian safely down on firm earth.

During the coming winter, when prospectors must lay up their tools, Edmonton's residents learned that life was not going to be dull for their lively guest. Again, as he had done the previous winter, he was going to fly a plane for a sealing fleet off Canada's east coast.

Heedful of Jack Caldwell's blunt appraisal of their landing-field, at once civic authorities arranged for a beginning to be made in preparing it as a proper air harbour. Before the work was completed, another pair of "first-flighters" paid the city a visit.

Planning a novel cross-Canada air voyage, J. Dalzell McKee, a wealthy American from Pittsburgh, Pa., had bought a Douglas seaplane and acquired as pilot a man who had considerable flying experience in western and eastern Canada, Squadron Leader Earl Godfrey.

Like the explorers and voyageurs of old, McKee hoped to follow an all-water route across the dominion that would bring them eventually to the shores of the western sea.

Handicapped by bad weather, slowly McKee and Godfrey worked their way westward from Montreal. Across eastern farmsteads, forest wilderness and prairie they guided their seaplane, eventually settling down without difficulty outside Edmonton at Lake Wabamun, the water that Captain MacLaren had planned for a port.

From Wabamun they raced successfully, in a single jump, over the towering mountain ranges to Vancouver. Here was another first-of-a-kind flight to show the people of Alberta's capital what could be achieved.

Within the city, work was now proceeding apace on the tiny ground air harbour.

"The city is constructing land courses on the Hagmann estate," a news report announced.

Two government planes from High River in the south, it added, were to come to spend the winter doing test-flying in Edmonton and were to use the little clapboard hangar already built on the premises.

Soon it was found that for even the modest preparations being made on the landing-field, the sum voted was too small. The work that was being done included the ploughing, levelling and discing of the runways and then the seeding of them to grass. So, at a civic council meeting on October 12, Alderman East requested that the original appropriation of \$400 be increased to \$600. This motion, too, met with the approval of the civic representatives.

Next arose the problem of christening the infant airstrip with a suitable name. This was pondered at the next council meeting and steps were taken to honour Mayor Blatchford for his enthusiastic support of this novel municipal project. Alderman Douglas suggested that application be made to the proper department at Ottawa to have the air harbour named the Blatchford field. Heartily this motion also was approved.

As for arrangements for the formal opening of Canada's Number One airport, officials quickly discovered that the great autocrat of northern skies, the weather, played a major part in any plans being shaped.

The ceremony was to be timed to the arrival of two Royal Canadian Air Force planes from the High River base, which, it was thought, would spend the balance of the winter in Edmonton. In readiness for the journey north to the capital, these two machines were shod with skis. On the new Blatchford field a generous blanket of crisp white snow lay waiting their arrival. But at High River in the chinook-swept south of the Province, there was still insufficient snow for a takeoff.

At last, by Saturday, January 8, 1927, the weather decided to co-



operate. Word was flashed about that the machines were on their way north and officials and spectators rushed by automobile out to the new-old air harbour.

Neatly Flight Lieutenant R. Collis, officer commanding Number Two Squadron at High River, and Edmonton's own Flying Officer Punch Dickins set their silver Siskins down on the whitened little field.

A new mayor, A. U. G. Bury, smilingly welcomed the pilots, handed them souvenir gifts, and declared the port open for business.

The afternoon's headlines, "Municipal Aerodrome, first in all Canada, is officially opened," reminded readers who had not attended the ceremony that they were now all co-owners in this novel curiosity, an air harbour. So next day, Sunday, hundreds more flocked by car and by foot to examine their new possession.

The patch of snow-covered field didn't look like much, just a bit of the old Hagmann farm now buried in snow. Neither did the drab fifty-five-by-sixty-foot clapboard hangar.

But the planes were a joy to behold. They were single-seated Siskins that had been sent from Britain especially for the testing of flight under low-temperature conditions. Smart little fighters, they were equipped with Jaguar engines of 400 horse-power proven to drive at a maximum speed of 145 miles per hour.

Flight Lieutenant Collis, it was learned, must shortly return to his base at High River. Before he flew back southward, he left some provocative words behind for all to ponder. Eloquently he recounted, at a dinner marking the historic occasion, the advantages the new Blatchford field might possess.

"Canada," he said, "due to her great expanse of flat country affording ample landing facilities on both land and water, her scattered population and the great distance between centres, provides an almost unlimited sphere for aviation . . . We also enjoy, in this country, suitable climatic conditions, fog, one of the greatest obstacles to flying in Europe, being very rarely encountered here."

Congratulating the local citizenry on their initiative, he made a telling comparison for the years to come. "A city without aerodrome facilities in the future may be compared to a city without railway facilities today."

Then the dedicated airman fired a parting shot. "I hope that all

interested in the development of aviation will cause to be formed here the first Canadian flying club. That is, the Edmonton Flying Club."

Officer Dickins, left to carry on alone the testing of flight in sub-zero weather, bustled about to get on with the chore assigned to him. Occasionally he spared the time to accept an invitation to speak at a luncheon club when he described to his hearers something of his work and tried to impress upon them the great need for what he was trying to do.

"The only military unit in the world performing civilian services," he proudly designated the Royal Canadian Air Force. "In forest fire prevention, in conservation and survey, in exploratory and re-classification surveys," he added, "Canada leads the world." In commercial aviation and in air mail service, he sadly observed, "she is lagging far behind." In these fields, he prophesied, "will come her greatest air development."

During the next few weeks, the city's inhabitants would recall his prophetic words as for a moment they craned their necks to watch the smart Siskin climb above Jasper Avenue. Only for a moment, though. For, as someone said, "When the temperature goes down, Punch goes up."

So, while folks took a quick look at the daring plane and the daring pilot before ducking back into the snug shelter of some heated building, Punch kept on climbing. That, of course, was his pioneering chore.

Already there was talk, only talk, of the possibility of air-mail services in Canada, especially to some of her more isolated areas. Could an aeroplane hope to operate, say, when and where it was obviously most needed? In winter, for example, in the immense sub-Arctic regions?

Sceptics laughed at the mad notion that such flights would be possible. Over Edmonton it was now the job of Flying Officer Dickins to prove what could be accomplished.

Day after day, as lengthening daylight brought lower and lower sub-zero temperatures, Punch climbed higher and higher. The sturdy little plane was built to rise up to 10,000 feet in six minutes flat. Usually, the farther he rose, the colder he got. Though he tested all sorts of winter clothing outfits in the unheated plane, he reached one sensible definite conclusion.

"I'm convinced," he told a reporter, "that the only thing that will keep a man warm is heat in the plane."

Once in a rare while, he found a temperature treat in store for him aloft in the frosty heavens.

"One day when it was twenty below zero in Edmonton," he afterwards told admiring hearers, "I discovered that it was getting warmer as I climbed, until at 5000 feet the thermometer registered fifty above.

"A strong west wind of the chinook type was blowing from the mountains at the higher level. But it wasn't until two days later that it managed to displace the cold air hugging the earth."

With winter's ending, Punch hopped back to his station at High River. Time and again during his stay in the city, he tried to awaken his fellow-citizens to the aerial opportunities lying in wait for them.

In the near future, he forecast with wizard accuracy, "a three-days' journey between Edmonton and Aklavik at the mouth of the Mackenzie will become routine schedule." Winter flying, he concluded from his experiments, "presents no great difficulties."

In these experiments he had received, he added, splendid co-operation from Professor Charles Robb at the University of Alberta. For some time this hard-working scientist had been testing a Liberty aeroplane motor in winter conditions and his discoveries had been of great help to him.

As for himself, he continued with characteristic modesty, he had encountered a little personal discomfort and a few frostbites because he was flying in an unheated plane.

"It's possible to heat planes," he concluded as he continued to hammer home the great possibilities ahead, "and to fit them so that the last of the troubles of the winter flyer will be eliminated."

"Form Canada's first flying club," Punch's commanding officer had exhorted Edmontonians. With these words ringing in their ears, tentative plans for such a club and for a ground school became, during the spring of 1927, a persistent topic of conversation among the sky-minded.

Then came, on July the first, the day of the great parade that was to celebrate locally Canada's diamond jubilee of confederation. With it came another skilled pilot to add aerial displays to the joyful celebrations.

The young man, Lieutenant Paul Calder, who was now sent by the federal government from High River in response to a special

request by those arranging the fete, was another Edmonton son who had distinguished himself in the overseas skies during World War One. During the past two years he had continued a brilliant flying career in aerial survey work all over the western prairies.

Still ready as ever to enjoy a ride in the heavens and to demonstrate his faith in the future of flying, Kenny Blatchford, now a member in the federal parliament for East Edmonton, climbed into the plane with Paul.

With abrupt swoops and steep climbs, with tailspins and high dives, the pilot zoomed up and down the sky. For many of the new generation growing up, here was a first generous eye-full of gay aeronautics. For the oldsters, here were re-awakened memories of how often seven and eight years ago May and Gorman and Tailyour had treated them to sky-stunting with machines that would probably now be regarded as completely antiquated.

Soon the great day was all over and Paul Calder flew back to High River, from there to resume other duties in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Undisturbed, again the grain grew tall and strong in the fields surrounding the deserted Blatchford air harbour. Then all at once sharp eyes and keen ears within the city made a discovery.

## 1927-1928

TO ENCOURAGE the fostering of flying skill in Canada, the British government had offered to donate six light training planes to certain centres across the country. These machines, according to early proposals, were to go to Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

Great was the indignation among the air-minded within the city when the proposed disposal of the mooted gift was discovered. "Edmonton," it was hotly argued, "was the first city in Canada to own a municipal airport. She should have a fair claim to a couple of these planes."

Obviously, if the claim were to carry weight, it must come from an organized flying club. Quickly throwing off the lethargy of summer's heat and holidays, the men called a meeting for August 2nd in the Macdonald hotel. Again it was Wop May who instituted the proceedings.

Not only was a telegram drafted to Hon. J. L. Ralston, minister of militia and defence, requesting that Edmonton's claim for a share of the planes be considered, Mr. Blatchford took the chair and an executive was elected to head the new club. Wop was named president and with him on the executive were S. A. Yorke, Punch Dickins, John Sydie, Jimmy Bell and Enoch Loveseth.

"Some thirty-four acres have already been cultivated for landing course purposes," City Engineer Haddow told the meeting as he gave a progress report on the new civic aerodrome. The T-shaped hangar, of course, had sufficient space to house two modest machines.

While the processes of government were determining the destination of Britain's gift and the terms under which the gifts were to be passed on to the various municipalities, Edmonton's Aero club members resolved to act.

With or without an aeroplane to fly, they could and must, first of all, establish a ground school. So September's meeting laid plans accordingly.

Then, in mid-October, came the heart-warming news.

"It is now an assured fact," announced a news report, "that the Edmonton and Northern Alberta Aero Club will be given two light Moth planes by the Dominion government."

The joy-giving word had been contained in a letter to President Wop from G. J. Desbarats, deputy-minister of national defence. Edmonton's club, it appeared, had been the very first group in Canada to make application for planes.

There was a catch, of course. In fact, there were several. "Stringent conditions are laid down," the report added, "relative to the grant of the two planes." These were enough to dash all the soaring hopes of the personnel of the Aero club.

First, there must be proper provision for the maintenance, repairs and housing of the planes. Next, a flying field must be established, and the services of a qualified instructor, as well as a licensed air engineer, must be secured.

Furthermore, the club must have a membership of thirty persons physically fit to take examinations as pilots. Also there must be, within its roster of members, ten who had already qualified as pilots.

If the club cared to accept all these stipulations, an agreement would be drawn up, to become effective April the first of 1928 and for the ensuing five years. The Moths would be shipped west after that date.

Spurred by all these provisions to show the authorities that they indeed meant business, soon eighty-five club members were attending the ground school. Two wartime aviators, S. A. Yorke and Francis Dickins, a brother of Punch, were appointed instructors, and a series of thirty lectures was arranged for the pupils.

"It's a splendid new avenue for men anxious to learn to fly," commented Lieutenant Paul Calder, in town for a few days' leave. Then he was off to Ottawa on a mission that caused a fresh buzz of excitement.

A Canadian air-mail service was, so rumour asserted, about to be instituted. So Lieutenant Calder was summoned to eastern Canada to engage in experimental winter flying. The varied experience of this sturdily-built dark-haired young man particularly fitted him for this work, for he had done winter flying toward the end of the World War and had made intimate acquaintance with the vagaries of Canadian weather in his more recent aerial survey work.

Such promise that Canada's new air age might soon be more fact than fancy spurred ever-growing interest in Edmonton's air club.



By that December of 1927 it was blossoming as exuberantly as a Christmas cactus, with one hundred and twenty-five members enrolled. Ninety of these were registered as pupils in the ground school conducted in the Prince of Wales armoury.

Fortunately, the keen interest of Professor Robb and his associates in the scientific side of aeronautics proved of invaluable help at this time. For the university had acquired a collection of parts as well as several out-of-service planes. From these, the club got the loan of a grounded Avro and parts of a Fokker to serve as laboratory equipment for the school.

Then came dismaying news. Wop May, whose bread-and-butter duties lay still with an office machine company, was being transferred south to Calgary. Even his impending departure could not now entirely impede the forward progress of the club. Besides, they knew he'd be back.

At this bleak turn of events came, from a most unexpected source, heartening words of encouragement.

With the new year 1928 there arrived in town a distinguished visitor from overseas, Rt. Hon. L. C. Amery, secretary of state for the dominions, and what he had to say seeded a fresh variety of "aerial" thoughts in the home soil.

"Edmonton," pointed out this briskly-spoken guest, "is as near to London as is Toronto." It will become, he forecast, a northern depot for transoceanic flying services.

So, smiled the newspapers, Edmonton's northerly situation now turns out to be in its favour, a simple principle of physical geography being that the distance around a sphere is shorter nearer its poles.

Colonel Amery spoke from an old-time intimacy with the central Alberta areas. Before the Province was formed he had, he reminded his hosts, visited the little city after a journey by buckboard with Colonel Sam Steele. The pair had travelled from the end of steel at Battleford, sleeping under the stars where the town of Vermilion now stands, and where he had eyed the old buffalo trails threading brown ribbons in the rich green of the wild grass.

Again, four years later in 1909, he had journeyed over Alberta trails by buckboard, this time from Edmonton to Jasper.

Of the routes of this newest vehicle of transportation, the aeroplane, the stocky secretary of state concluded logically: "Air flights in northern latitudes are shorter and more practicable."

With spring's arrival, came more assuring news, building incentive to complete the ground school course.

One of the promised Moths was being sent to the R.C.A.F. headquarters at High River. There it was to be officially released to an Edmonton pilot.

Now the time had come to hire a qualified teacher for instruction in actual flying. On June 19 the executive announced their decision. They had appointed a chief instructor for their club. It was, of course, Wop May.

So "the blonde young man still anxious to fly" moved his home back to Edmonton and then hurried to Moose Jaw to take the special course that was compulsory for instructors. Again Kenny Blatchford reminded folks how much was owing to Wop.

"Most of the credit for the air field and the flying club here must go to Captain May," he commented as news of the appointment reached him. "Right away he interviewed me about the proposal to donate Moth trainers, and as a result telegrams were sent to Ottawa."

Already Wop was in High River helping to check the first Moth over for her trip north. Then Jimmy Bell took a train south to lend a hand.

At last, at half past three in the afternoon of June 23rd, Wop lifted the pretty yellow machine from the wind-swept prairie at the southern air base and headed northward. Ten years after Katherine Stinson had anxiously guided that first plane above the rail line leading to Edmonton, Wop and Jimmy were bringing the open sesame to a local air training plan.

Teeming rain beaten down by tearing head-winds slowed their progress. With them was travelling an R.C.A.F. machine, piloted by Lieutenant Spadbury, who was going on to the Peace River country to undertake forestry patrol. After a tedious flight of two and three-quarter hours, they finally pushed all the way over the 230-mile stretch to Edmonton.

Cautiously then the pilots eased their machines down on the sopping Blatchford field.

Sleek and shining, the little plane was the golden reality of many months of dreaming and planning and organizing.

At this time Edmonton had still another mayor willing to risk his neck with the seasoned Wop May. Within the week after the plane's arrival, His Worship Mayor Bury agreed to a test flight in the new pride of the Aero club. Up and up she climbed until Wop noted with delight that the altimeter registered 7000 feet.

As he began dropping to a landing, Mr. Bury became, like former Mayor Blatchford, suddenly conscious of the problem of a safe descent. As he stepped from the plane, he looked about and sadly shook his head.

What should have been the city's special care, Canada's first municipal air harbour, was in pretty bad shape. "It's overgrown with weeds and will have to be mowed," he reported to the city hall.

Such minor drawbacks could not now dampen the enthusiasm of the Aero club. Straightway they began to lay plans for a first air show, which would of necessity have to be strictly a ground affair and which was arranged to take place in the Riverview pavilion.

Diligently, too, the classes pursued their lessons. Wop's first senior class of five included two former wartime pilots taking a refresher course, the president of the air club, Cy Becker, and Lieutenant Marlowe Kennedy; the other three pupils being Alex. Clarke, R. F. Brinkman and Art Rankin.

Still Wop's old dream of building up a commercial air company lived with him day and night. Surely now the time was propitious.

Over in the United States there had been Lindbergh's glorious conquest of the Atlantic of the previous spring. In Canada, there were, in various far-scattered regions, a number of pilots beginning to operate gypsy flying services. There had been the achievements of Pilot Caldwell in his immense biplane. There were the accomplishments of H. A. "Doc" Oaks, whose name was now very much in the news.

So delighted had Dalzell McKee been with the kindnesses and co-operation he had received in his cross-Canada flight with Major Godfrey that he arranged, before his death the following year, for an annual award to be made in Canadian aviation. A trophy bearing his name was to be given annually to the man who had contributed the most during the year to further the cause of aviation.

In this spring of 1928 came the announcement of the inaugural winner. It was Captain Oaks, who had pioneered the Patricia Flying Company in northern Ontario. Already Oaks and one or two associates had persuaded the wealthy Winnipeg grain merchant, James A. Richardson, to form what was to become the great central company, Western Canada Airways. Incorporated in 1927, the company had purchased a fleet of Fokkers and rumour had it that they planned to expand westward.

"Right now is the time," argued Wop, "to get in on the ground floor with a locally organized company."

His friend Cy Becker, another wartime pilot with a first-rate record and a son-in-law of the pioneer publisher, Frank Oliver, who had in 1920 welcomed General Mitchell's Alaska-bound flyers, was ready to take the chance.

So also was another friend, Vic Horner, a former soldier who had been badly wounded on the Somme. Vic was already in the ground transport business, operating a bus service which was said to have been the very first in western Canada.

"Yes," Cy and Vic agreed. Surely now there was a good chance for an aeroplane company to become a paying concern. Surely now the fruit was ripe for the plucking.

Again with the assistance of friends, Wop began to lay the groundwork for the organizing of an aeroplane company. This time the enterprise was to be known as Commercial Airways.

Thoroughly they investigated the kinds of planes on the market. Finally they settled on one that was both sturdily built and yet reasonably priced.

Small and costing only \$6000, the Avro Avian they ordered from England had a reputation for sound achievement. It was of the same make which Captain Bert Hinkler piloted in his long epic flight to Australia. Its sturdiness was going presently to play an unguessed factor in its new homeland.

"This Avian," Wop reported, "is able to go anywhere. It can be equipped with wheels, floats or skis. And it has a tested top speed of 100 miles per hour."

When it arrived and was assembled in shining glory, Wop had a special point to make to induce customers to ride in it. By now the second yellow Moth had arrived for the Aero club's use.

"Many people think," he said, "that they can hire a ride in the Moth trainers. This isn't so. These planes were loaned for instructional work only for members of the Aero Club."

Which meant that once more Edmontonians wanting a pleasure spin in the heavens were going to be able to indulge their wishes. They could hire a ride with Wop in the breezy open cockpit of the Avian.

While some fellow-citizens sat back watching curiously to see if this time Wop and his friends would make a "go" of their new enterprise, others flocked to the air harbour to check for themselves

all the aerial goings-on. Soon the grain crops growing along the runway edges were being trampled flat by the jostling crowds.

Pilots, too, were finding it difficult to land in the narrow space ringed by the fields of lush oats. Already one accident doing considerable damage to a plane was attributed to this mixture of flying-field and grain-growing farm. The lessee, Mrs. Mary Watt, counter-claimed with a bill for damages to her crops.

To end the conflict, in September of 1928 her lease on the farmland was not renewed by the city and council voted the sum of \$2000 to put the flying-field back into shape. Even a telephone was installed now in the little hangar.

"If Edmonton is to keep pace with other cities," urged the city's commissioner David Mitchell, "the erection of a permanent hangar at the Blatchford field is a project which the city must consider in the very near future. If council approves, I am hopeful we may build an up-to-date hangar next year."

Fortunately, Edmonton had its old life-artery from the fur-trading days, the muddy North Saskatchewan River. At least twice that summer famous visiting flyers accepted, like Pilot Caldwell, its hospitality.

By now the celebrated "Doc" Oaks had parted company with his enterprising associates of Western Canada Airways, Captain F. G. Stevenson, winner of the American Harmon trophy, and W. L. Brintnell of Winnipeg. He had moved on to work for a novel Toronto-formed corporation, the Northern Aerial Minerals Exploration Company. Sponsored by the energetic Jack Hammell of that city, it had joined the race to capture some of the choice mineral prizes of Canada's uncharted northland.

Engaged to fly for this new organization, "Doc" Oaks had spent the summer moving engineers and prospectors and their gear to likely wilderness locations.

His base had been in northeastern Alberta at Fort McMurray, an old fur-trading centre at the junction of the Clearwater and the Athabasca rivers. Beside it lay Waterways, the terminus of the rail line popularly known as the "Muskeg Express" that wound unsteadily through bush, muskeg and farmland back to the supply metropolis of Edmonton and on which Pilot Caldwell had shipped his British amphibian.

News of the flights of these "invaders" from the east began to

quicken excitement in Alberta's capital. Especially did the promoters of the Commercial Airways Company heed with great interest the accomplishments of the daring Captain Oaks. On one occasion, they learned, he had set up a new record, flying from Fort McMurray to Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake and back all within the span of one day. He penetrated even as far north as Fort Simpson on the Mackenzie, where seven years before Captain Fullerton and Captain Gorman had been so plagued by misfortunes to their Junkers.

Finally, there came the day when "Doc" Oaks hopped his big hydroplane from Ft. Fitzgerald, Alberta's most northerly post, down to the North Saskatchewan River at Edmonton. He chose to anchor his machine on the murky water west of the High Level Bridge where it winds past Victoria Park and the municipal golf links.

At the sight and sound of the plane, golfers dropped their sticks, ladies riding the bridle paths of the park flicked their horses' backs, and with all the small boys and dogs within a mile's radius they rushed to the river bank. A reporter jumped in a canoe and frantically waved the paddle in welcome.

As Captain Oaks and his mechanic, John Humble, stepped ashore, there was one burning question on all lips,

"Did you find any gold, captain?"

"No," was his disappointing answer. "It was just a preliminary survey."

Obviously this most enterprising of Canada's flying men had found, if not gold, or other precious minerals, at least a wealth of enviable adventure. At Fort Simpson, he related, the Indians, fearing the strange flying monster, named it "the Evil Spirit." Old sourdoughs, he added, had at first to be coaxed aboard.

"Now," the bronzed aviator chuckled, "they think it's the only thing for travel. They can't figure how they got so far in so short a time."

A fortnight later another headlining flyer bedded down on the flowing city-port. He was Squadron Leader Godfrey, who had made a brief acquaintance with Edmonton two years before on that first coast-to-coast seaplane flight with Dalzell McKee.

Here was fresh assurance to citizens that their community was a takeoff post for adventurers fanning out into the aerial unknown. Captain Oaks, like Pilot Caldwell, had been pushing the barriers back



northward. Godfrey's route, again like the explorers seeking the route to the western sea, pointed once more toward the Pacific.

In company with Sergeant Major Graham, Pilot Godfrey sought to establish a new cross-Canada flying record under auspices of the R.C.A.F. Persistent adverse weather conditions, from the time he lifted from Ottawa in the giant yellow Fairchild seaplane, hampered the flight.

Roaring down out of the dusky eastern sky, at day's end on September 6, they steered the great plane onto the river they had followed, like the fur-traders of old, all the way from North Battleford. Shrewdly they selected, in spite of the storm and the woolly darkness, a safe spot to anchor. The moorage they chose lay near the Exhibition Grounds that had already seen the phenomenal evolution from Hunt to Robinson, Stinson to Locklear, and May and Gorman and Tailour.

Thus benighted at Edmonton, the next day the flyers overhauled their machine while they waited for the storm to lift. Within twenty minutes the following morning, they reached their intended overnight stop, the waters of Lake Wabamun where Godfrey and McKee had anchored on the previous trip.

Here awaited them the aviation high test gas for the 450-horsepower Wasp motor. Here, too, the Fairchild machine and an Edmonton man were going to face another testing.

"If the weight of the Edmonton federal member does not prevent the seaplane from rising out of Wabamun when it is loaded with fuel on Friday morning," related a reporter, "Mr. Blatchford will make the last leg of the trip with Major Godfrey."

Alas for the ambitious plane with its cruising possibility of 1400 miles. Alas for the enthusiastic air-mindedness of Ex-Mayor Kenny Blatchford. After an hour and a half of unsuccessful attempts to become airborne, two barrels of gas had to be dumped. Metaphorically, too, the plucky Mr. Blatchford suffered a like fate. He had to stay behind.

"Lessened lifting capacity, handicaps being the 2300-foot altitude and the lack of any kind of aid in takeoff, were," it was alleged, "the reasons for the difficulties encountered."

With his plane's long cruising radius of 1400 miles, again Squadron Leader Godfrey got safely down at the Vancouver base.

"The Godfrey flight," commented G. J. Desbarats, deputy minister

of militia, speaking a little soon, "demonstrated that natural waterways prove the best route for trans-Canada flyers."

On the morning of the 10th of September, accompanied by Squadron Leader L. S. Breadner, Godfrey headed for Prince Rupert on the first leg of the return journey. Anxiously Edmonton folk waited for word of their progress.

It was indeed a season to keep citizens on the aerial *qui vive*. Overhead the small yellow Moths were training local men to fly, and Wop May and Vic Horner were beginning to taxi passengers in their new Avian. Godfrey, like Vérendrye and Thompson and Fraser, was pioneering a water route across the vastness of Canada.

In the northern fringeland, airborne men were beginning to comb the wilderness for minerals. Already in the east another new syndicate, Dominion Explorers, had been formed and stirring stories were beginning to trickle into the Alberta capital of the race among the various outfits to outdo each other in the desperate rush to discover new wealth.

Nearer home, the planes of the R.C.A.F. continued dutifully their forestry patrol. As well, they were engaged, from the 5000-foot altitude, in a mammoth mapping job of northern Alberta and Saskatchewan. Their cartographical chore included the charting of lakes, rivers, and all other streams, swamps, timber types, rock outcroppings, and the varied landmarks of a wide region resounding for the first time to the drone of an aeroplane engine.

From Winnipeg, Western Canada Airways was spreading its spider web farther and farther in all directions and report asserted that within weeks its machines would include Edmonton within a monster air-mail-express network.

Suggesting that even more air forestry patrolling must be necessary, early September of 1928 brought a new kind of impediment to this sudden blossoming of aviation. Bush fires, raging out of control, cast a thick smoke-shroud over the city, and the Moth trainers had to be grounded on the Blatchford field.

Over the sweep of tundra flinging far away to the northeast, this smoke-pall was not one of the hazards to air navigation. The very next day after flying was banned over Edmonton, a deep eight-column headline proudly bannered the front page of the city's newspapers: "Punch Dickins Flies over Barren Lands."

Remembering how this local son had the previous winter persistently dared to go up as the thermometer mercury went down, beaming citizens were not too surprised as they read of this first flight of tremendous magnitude. Punch had penetrated clear across Canada's great "blind spot."

Flying a giant Fokker for Western Canada Airways, he had hopped from Winnipeg to Baker Lake at the west end of Chesterfield Inlet away up on the drear northwestern shore of Hudson Bay. From there he had skimmed right across the windswept tundras westward to Fort Smith, a post immediately above Alberta's 60th parallel boundary and some 1750 miles from his takeoff point.

Sharing with Punch and his plane this record-ring first were Colonel C. D. H. MacAlpine, president of Dominion Explorers, Richard Pearce, editor of *The Northern Miner*, and his air engineer, Bill Nadin.

Reading how Eskimos, shaking with fear, scurried for cover as the great bird circled for a landing, Edmonton aviators grinned with delight. This bold first flight they saw as the beginning of the new era they had long dreamed about.

Returning to Winnipeg from a round trip of over 4000 miles, Punch reported the almost unknown Barrens to be a territory "composed of sixty per cent lakes, with barren rock and a little vegetation making up the remainder . . . We saw," he added, "no sign of life."

Helping Edmonton to push back still farther her air horizons, came, within succeeding days, more and more rousing headlines.

"Winnipeg Edmonton air loop planned," blazoned the press. "Aerial passenger service to be launched on the prairies."

Next day came the glad news that Godfrey's party, which had been overdue at Prince Rupert, had now put safely down on the river at Peace River town.

"He made a beautiful swim," an eye-witness happily sent word, "that would have done credit to the grey goose."

Excitement at the sight of the plane, the first since the Imperial Oil's *Vic* and *Rene* with Fullerton and Gorman had homed there seven years before, was boundless. It was, the reporter added, "like the Yule spirit when the children look for Santa." So ebullient was the stir at the arrival of the air visitors, in fact, that the teachers gave all the school children the balance of the day as holiday.

Now the dense smoke, with fog, began to lay a deeper and deeper blanket over the landmarking lakes and rivers. Within hours after Godfrey and his party were outbound from Peace River town, they were again missing. First report claimed they had come down on the wide Slave River north of the Alberta boundary.

Right at home then a thrilling new flight inspired another comparison with the age-old claimants to the air. By this time the blinding smoke-pall had lifted from the Edmonton vault.

"Sailing out of the clear blue sky through the brilliant sunshine of Wednesday morning," blithely announced a news report, "gently as a bird on the wing came the great De Havilland plane piloted by Brintnell."

Thus arrived in the city, marking a new milestone, the first machine of Winnipeg's Western Canada Airways. The avowed purpose of this history-making flight was to test the possibilities of inaugurating a mail-passenger-express service looping the prairie cities. Carrying letters and express, the ship had swooped down that morning from Calgary.

"This is indeed a red-letter day for Edmonton," smiled Mayor Bury as he greeted the organizing genius of the company, Superintendent-Pilot Brintnell. Warmly he congratulated Western Canada for its successful accomplishments so far and expressed the fervent wish that the projected loop would surely include Alberta's capital.

Also on hand to welcome the newcomer was G. S. Dawson, manager of the local branch of the James Richardson Company, the benevolent owners of the airways fleet. Smilingly acknowledging the greetings, Pilot Brintnell explained that he had been late in arriving due to the strong head-winds. The trip from Calgary had taken all of two hours and twenty minutes. On the previous day he had also attempted to make the journey, but vicious weather had forced him back when he finally reached the half-way city of Red Deer.

Weather and smoke were continuing to plague the Godfrey flight also. At last arrived word of the fate of the party. They had crashed into the Peace River near Carcajou, two hundred miles north from Peace River town.

Though the R.C.A.F. planes had that late summer diligently conducted their forestry patrol, a dry spell had fanned uncontrollably the fire menace. So thick was the smoke in which Godfrey and his

associates found themselves that they could no longer distinguish even the banks of the river they had followed out of Peace River town.

"We couldn't see, from the wall of dense smoke," Pilot Godfrey recounted afterward, "where the smoke ended and the water began."

As they began to drop down in a forced landing, someone had the presence of mind to open the cabin door. In a moment, water was flooding the compartment and all four men had to "swim for it." Thanks to the steel-clad cabin and the opened door, all escaped with their lives. At a trapper's cabin buried in the bush on the river bank, they found human help. Repeatedly Godfrey and Breadner dived to the sunken plane to retrieve their personal kit and whatever equipment could be salvaged.

It was a time for trial and error. Especially it was a time for more and persistent trying. City Engineer Haddow was home from the east urging that "Edmonton should lose no opportunity to benefit from recent developments in aviation." He had, he said, inspected many fine airports in the east. He was still satisfied that "natural conditions here are excellent and that the local field can be developed into a first-class institution."

Arriving on a routine inspection tour, George Abbott of the aviation branch of the Department of Defence confirmed his words. Duly he checked over the premises, the books, the training Moths and the hangar, and expressed himself as more than satisfied.

"The ground school work is the most complete I've seen thus far on my trip through the Prairie Provinces," he assured the Aero club executive.

There was but one big fly in the ointment. It was the need, as Mr. Abbott saw it, "to improve without delay the flying field."

Within days after the inspector's visit and to confirm, as it were, his commendation of the air club's work, along came the official certificates for the very first pilots to be graduated from the school, R. P. Owen, Art Rankin, Alex. Clarke and R. F. Brinkman. To follow was the government's delightful pat-on-the-back, a four-hundred dollar cheque, one hundred dollars as promised to the club for each successful pupil.

A new thorn in the flesh was now nagging the executive. Wop May was becoming increasingly busy with his Commercial Airways Company. Besides, an instructor in a government-assisted school

should not, it was felt, be associated as well with a private enterprise.

Where could they find a replacement for Wop? Where could they locate an instructor of first-rate calibre sufficiently dedicated to accept the modest salary the club could afford to pay?

Vice-President Jimmy Bell thought back to those old days in the Royal Air Force.

"I know of one man who was in my squadron," he told the club. "Captain Maurice Burbidge, the best instructor I ever encountered. I wonder if he'd consider such a post."

In World War One, Jimmy related, Captain Burbidge had soon distinguished himself. Transferred from the cavalry to the air force, he had soloed after only two and a half hours' instruction. Presently he was himself instructing and was next transferred to the Independent Air Service, one of that tiny group of crack pilots singled out for long distance bombing.

At the war's end, Captain Burbidge had stayed with the work he loved, going on to fly in India and to do more instructing.

"Perhaps," mused Jimmy, "he might consider such a post."

A cablegram was dispatched to Captain Burbidge. Soon there came that lucky day for the nourishing of aviation in Edmonton, the day when a reply arrived from Captain Burbidge.

His answer was, "Yes. Coming."

Released from instructing duties, Wop turned with renewed energy to rustling business for his company. Together with his partner, Vic Horner, he undertook one day to move an unusual sort of consignment. Winging off to Calgary, the pair were entrusted by a local jewellery firm with a parcel of diamonds to be delivered in the southern city.

On another day, the irrepressible Wop set off in another direction, up. Experimentally he soared higher and higher into outer space, until the altimeter recorded 10,000 feet. "A new record," was the proud comment, "for a two-seater plane in this area."

Before this year of beginnings had ended, there came the innovation promised on that "red-letter day" when Leigh Brintnell descended on the city. On a trial basis only, the mail-express-passenger air service began.

The first pioneering plane on the westward route met disaster outside of Calgary. Attempting in his De Havilland to take off for Edmonton from a rough stubble field, Pilot W. J. "Buck" Buchanan



failed to gain sufficient momentum. Curious crowds and cars and overhead wires impeded him and he swerved the machine to avoid them. Striking a fence, the plane cracked up, bursting into flames seconds after the pilot and his passengers scrambled to safety.

Western Canada, however, was determined to carry through their bold plans for testing the projected service. Later that same week, a super-universal Fokker monoplane, piloted by Punch Dickins, skimmed over the prairie from Regina west to Calgary and then on north toward Edmonton.

Overtaken by late-autumn darkness, Punch pondered where to land. At the Blatchford Field, anxious watchers set out oil flares to help him down. Unaware of such thoughtful anticipation of his needs, Punch noted a nice smooth-looking grain-field outside the small city of Wetaskiwin. On it he descended to a safe three-point landing for the night. Early the next morning he arrived in Edmonton with the first mail of the trial flights. Again for his home city he had helped to write history.

Although airfields were obviously ill-equipped and patronage was disappointingly slight, Western Canada stubbornly persisted in its schemes for expansion. Before the year was out, they determined to establish, on a test basis, a regular schedule in the novel air-mail service looping the cities of the prairie.

## 1928-1929

A THREE-ACT PLAY set for Monday, December 10, 1928, was to make the day a dramatic and momentous one in the annals of Alberta's capital.

Early morning was to see the inauguration of the trial mail service, with a plane departing from the city loaded with outgoing sacks. The afternoon was to herald the arrival of a second machine piled with incoming mail. All day private citizens, every man and woman eligible to vote, had each his and her little bit to add toward building a climax, or an anticlimax. For voters flocking to the polls to elect a mayor, aldermen and members of the school board were also, as burgesses, to say yes or no to several money bylaws. Among these was the relevant question, "Should the city spend the sum of \$23,860 to develop the out-of-date airport?"

On the previous day, Sunday, there was a prologue to pique the interest of taxpayers in the bylaw. Three planes raced round the great bowl above the ratepayers to salute them in vote-catching greeting.

Flying the giant Fokker that was to carry the mail on its first scheduled flight out of town was Pilot Paul Calder, who was now, too, an employee of the expanding Western Canada Airways. With him, as a matter of course, was the man after whom the flying-field was named, the enthusiastic Kenny Blatchford.

In a second machine Captain Wop May displayed the capabilities of the dexterous Flying-club Moth.

Wooing the voters in the third plane was the president of the Aero Club, Cy Becker. He demonstrated his skill at the controls of the smart little Avian.

In the eerie dark of Monday morning, the first act got under way without hitch. Fortunately, the weather was mild and pleasant. But the stage settings were distinctly amateur.

For centre, there was the small shed-like hangar that had been

doubtfully knocked together by Jock McNeill's men at the urging of Keith Tailyour, and that lacked modern facilities such as water and sewer service.

Flanking it were the runways that until this past autumn had been hedged in by oat crops and that were a soggy morass in wet weather. From kerosene oil-pots, feeble flames that blew out in windy weather made an attempt to light the aviator down the runway.

Dutifully on hand in the bleak morning dusk were Mayor Bury and ex-Mayor Blatchford. Each shook hands with Pilot Calder and wished him the best of luck. A photographer snapped a picture as Postmaster Fred Smith handed him a first sack of mail.

Then the balance of the load, eight more sacks containing in all some 12,500 letters and cards, was heaved aboard. The prop was set in motion and Sky-Mailman Calder roared off eastward toward Saskatoon.

By late afternoon, the second act also was shaping according to schedule. At 11:30 in the morning, Punch Dickins had left Regina with west-bound mail, some of which had just been transferred from Pilot Buchanan's Fokker arriving from Winnipeg. After brief stops at Saskatoon and North Battleford, Punch raced home on the final lap, bringing with him a heavy load of first-flight covers to gladden the hearts of philatelists.

Applause at the happy ending of this second act was particularly hearty, for Punch wherever he appeared was still being heaped with congratulations for his magnificent Barren lands flight. Laconically he accepted all the plaudits with the silence for which he was becoming famous and with the words that were to become a sort of slogan for many other aerial adventurers in the years to come, "Let's get on with the job."

It was late evening before the final act concluded. Sad to say, it brought a sorry anticlimax for the Aero Club president, Cy Becker, and for all the burgeoning hopes and plans of the growing numbers of sky-minded.

The airport bylaw had been defeated.

A record number of voters had flocked to the polls, and 14,971 ballots had been cast, ringing up the biggest vote so far in the city's brief history. But just under the two-thirds majority of ratepayers had approved the bylaw. Obviously, many citizens disapproved of

the squandering of such a large sum on a project having to do with aviation, an activity still regarded as being merely a passing fancy or at best a pleasant Sunday afternoon diversion.

Happily Mayor Bury thanked the voters for his re-election. Sorrowfully then he bemoaned the rejection of the airport bylaw.

"Approval meant so much to Edmonton," he gently rebuked them. "People are losing sight of the great importance of the development of the tourist business by use of aeroplanes."

"It's the one fly in the ointment," bemoaned Commissioner David Mitchell, as he rejoiced to learn that the ratepayers had consented to his spending certain sums for paving, grading, and graveling of streets, for remodelling the fire hall and for buying new fire-fighting equipment.

It remained for fate, the redoubtable Wop May, and with him the valiant Vic Horner, to act out a new hair-raising drama that would write a different epilogue to this chapter of the city's air history.

On the very last day of the year an urgent appeal reached the frontier-capital. Already then the plea for help was almost two weeks old.

At Little Red River, fifty miles below Fort Vermilion on the Peace River, diphtheria had broken out, a man lay near death, and antitoxin serum was urgently needed.

A wire with a message that had been relayed by dog-team and that informed of the desperate predicament was received by the provincial department of health from the doctor resident at Fort Vermilion:

Logan, Hudson's Bay man at Red River, bad case laryngeal diphtheria . . . If possible, rush aeroplane. Good landing and no snow. If snow, will clear landing strip on river both at Fort Vermilion and Red River . . . Send intubation apparatus and several hundred units antitoxin toxoid for 200. Cannot leave Logan's bedside. Do all possible. Real emergency. H. A. HAMMAN, M.D.

Unluckily, at this date in Edmonton there was no machine suitable for such a flight in the depth of winter. Its brief testing circuit of flights concluded, Western Canada Airways had already withdrawn all its machines to Winnipeg. Down at High River, the R.C.A.F. station had likewise shut up shop for the winter. In Edmonton there had been pleasantly mild days when brief flights could be made in the Commercial Airways Avian and the Aero Club

Moths. There had been talk of making skis to fit the machines for takeoff on snow or ice, but so far this had not been accomplished.

The finger of destiny pointed at the Avian. Could the slender wheeled aircraft, unheated and with an open cockpit exposing occupants to the full fury of winter's blasts, possibly make such a trip?

Dr. Malcolm Bow, the deputy minister of health, passed the request along to Cy Becker, president of the Aero Club. With his partners, Wop and Vic, he discussed the possibility of such a flight.

Promptly Cy had an answer ready for Dr. Bow.

"We are confident," he said, "a flight could be successfully made in the Avian plane in the hands of such experienced men as Captain May and Vic Horner. They are quite prepared to undertake this hazardous mission of mercy."

So with chocolate in their pockets and charcoal burners at their feet to keep the antitoxin and their feet from freezing, Wop and Vic bundled into the little open plane. All morning R. F. Brinkman, the mechanic at the field, checked and tested every part of the small machine.

Laughing at death breathing around them a ground temperature of thirty-three degrees below zero, they gave her the gun. As the whirring propeller stirred a blizzard of snow behind them, they roared down the white field. With the smooth flight of an eagle they lifted her northwestward into the still more frigid winter sky.

As the machine dwindled to a speck in the frost-hazed atmosphere, all who could help hurried to do what they could to assist in bringing the pair back alive. To alert homesteaders and villagers along the projected route the little plane was to follow, the pioneering infant radio station CJCA began broadcasting special reports.

This route lay above the winding line of steel that snaked its slow way through homestead and wilderness bushland to the town of Peace River, and thereafter above the tortuous Peace to the Fort Vermilion settlement. So to their remote trading posts in this latter region the Hudson's Bay Company and Revillon Frères flashed notices to their employees to watch for the Avian. The provincial police crackled out requests to their men manning stations in the area to be ready to lend a hand.

Now all that remained to do was to wait in tense anxiety. Pressed for his opinion as to their chances, the flyer who knew a good deal about the Edmonton area atmosphere in the sub-zero cold, Punch

Dickins, cautiously admitted, "I believe Wop and Vic have a good chance of getting through safely. Of course with a small open plane, it won't be any picnic."

Gloomily some one else sized up the cold facts, "From the time they took off, they were as good as dead men. But they didn't mind."

Stirred to life by reports of the flight, all along their route the little isolated settlements joined in watching for the pair. Soon heavy frost was coating the wings and the fuselage and the short winter day was nearing an end. So that first night they put down at McLennan, fifty miles short of their first goal, the town of Peace River.

From this point Cy Becker got a progress report from the pair:

Landed safely on lake near town where people had cleared off marked landing field. Unable to make Peace River town on account of poor visibility. Had to fly under 500 feet most of the way. Strong head winds. Will leave at daylight tomorrow. Wop and Vic.

Next morning, a Thursday, they brought their frost-painted plane safely down onto the cleared ice at Peace River town. During the brief refueling halt there, they wired a message to radio station CJCA:

Trip successful so far but visibility becoming bad owing to cloudy weather and light snow falling. Will take off as soon as fuel tanks are refilled. Would like CJCA to broadcast Ft. Vermilion advising possibility arrival this afternoon. If we don't get there, have dog teams sent up river (south) to meet us. Plane will follow course of river but weather conditions and poor visibility may prevent completion of flight today and force landing on river ice if storm becomes much worse.

Leaving Peace River to resume the rugged push north, the plane taxied two hundred yards along the river ice. Unable to clear the railway bridge, the machine nosed down under it, passing safely between the piers.

With the knots of prayerful spectators, Sub-Inspector E. Radcliffe of the Alberta Provincial Police stood watching it disappear into the north. Then he hurried to wire another message to Gerald Rice of CJCA:

Please broadcast Const. McCarthy at Fort Vermilion if plane not there tonight he is to come this way with dog team and supplies. Also broadcast to Carcajou Point (two-thirds of the way to Fort Vermilion) that if plane passes over there and is not back in reasonable time to arrange for dog teams from there.



Two hundred miles farther along the winter-desolate wilderness, Wop and Vic reached Fort Vermilion.

Here they had the good luck to be able to hand their precious packages right into the hands of Dr. Hamman. His first patient, Factor Logan, was already dead of the dread disease and he had himself hurried by dog-team to meet the plane.

Even more of a challenge the homecoming trail was to prove. Several times their engine cut out, due, they thought, to the poor quality of the gasoline they took on at Fort Vermilion. As they swooped down through the central arch of the bridge again at Peace River, almost all of their instruments were frozen and they had but one gallon of fuel left.

Frost-bitten and stiff with cold, they stumbled from the ice-sheathed Avian to be warmed by a heroes' welcome from the townspeople of Peace River.

The next day, Saturday, they worked over the machine. Sunday, loaded with emergency rations pressed upon them by crowds of well-wishers, forth again over the snow-blanketed land they set their course.

Presently the radio was broadcasting the good news. Astoundingly, Wop and Vic were returning from the dead. They were nearing home.

"When they arrive," urged a reporter, "let the plane ride down Portage. Trundle it down the two miles of wide pavement as the Romans welcomed heroes down the Appian way. Bring out the bands. Make it the greatest celebration in the history of the city."

Citizens didn't need urging. Ten thousand were soon surrounding the little Blatchford air harbour, swarming about the hangar, breaking the police barriers. Sirens shrieked. The newspapers put out extra editions. Cy Becker took up an Aero Club Moth and started out to meet the Avian.

Soon a blinding snow squall forced Cy to turn back. At the sight of a plane putting down, the waiting crowds surged forward. They fell back, greatly disappointed, when they discovered their mistake.

At last a black speck appeared through the snow-clouds to the northwest. Gradually it grew into the silver shape of the Avian. Breathless, the crowd stood still and tense.

As the slim plane settled down and taxied slowly forward, there was a sudden roar and a rush. In a wildly exulting surge, a mass of humanity was sweeping forward past all the police barriers to engulf

the oil-streaked frosted plane and the two half-frozen pilots. From the cockpit they lifted them and like a pair of cherished trophies carried them, shoulder high, into the warmer air of the tiny hangar.

"It's like fair day," breathed a rejoicing citizen. "Or the arrival of the Prince of Wales."

"Probably the greatest number of cars," noted another as his glance swept the sea of automobiles along Portage Avenue that had spewed forth such crowds, "ever assembled at any one time in Edmonton." Relief at their safe return was more profound than even when extras announced Lindbergh's arrival in Paris.

"Surely Lindbergh never had a welcome like this," grinned a young spectator as he whooped with joy.

As they began to talk through frozen lips, the pair could only express their half-dazed delight at getting home again. Helping hands were quickly stripping them of the extra layers of clothing in which they were enshrouded. Even the Avian had been padded to help fight the penetrating cold. Twice, though, she had been in danger of becoming a little too warm as fire threatened within her interior.

In all, the plane's performance was something of which her owners were mighty proud. Going the long way to follow the guiding rail-line and the river, she had logged nearly a thousand miles in sub-zero cold. Again, for the last hundred miles of the homeward way, she had to buck a head-wind and falling snow.

"We had to travel low, about 100 feet above the ground most of the way," described Vic.

"The cold froze up all of the instruments on the machine with the exception of the oil gauge," he added. "When we landed here, we had one gallon of gasoline left and we were mighty glad to be home."

"Now," exulted the air-minded, "now, thanks to Wop and Vic, surely a bylaw voting the desperately needed improvements to our air harbour would win the necessary majority.

"Now everyone has seen the rough condition of the field, the wretched approach to the cramped outdated hangar. Now everyone can realize how vital to our way of life the aeroplane has become."

"Edmonton is behind you," Mayor Bury assured the pair, "heart and soul and hand, and with its purse too."



On one of his early visits to Coppermine, Pilot Archie McMullen poses above a party of his customers, traders and Eskimos.

At Snowdrift, Pilot Farrell seeks relaxation from the controls during a caribou hunt.

Edmonton pilot Stan McMillan ready for the pioneering life of a bush pilot in the subarctic regions.



Will Rogers and Wiley Post aboard the Lockheed Orion are ready to take off for Alaska.

Wiley Post, snapped by Archie McMullen, on the wing of his Lockheed Orion a few days before he was killed.

Will Rogers, posing for Archie McMullen in the course of his last flight in 1935.

Again, at the first annual banquet of the Aero Club, held later in the month, the Mayor expressed something of the fresh surge of enthusiasm.

"A new spirit and a new interest have been created in flying through the flight of Wop and Vic with the antitoxin," he exclaimed. "The aerodrome is one of the best natural sites in the west. It may yet become the very best in the west."

His enthusiasm for altitudes, like that of former mayors Joe Clarke and Kenny Blatchford, was not, he added lightly, so easily measured. "In fact, I've been up in the air for eight years, since I've been in public office."

When it came his turn to speak, the vice-president of the club, Jimmy Bell, made a canny survey of expenses. "Cost of instruction for training pilots here in this club," he told his fellow-diners, "is lower than that of any other club in the Dominion."

Steadfast still in his conviction of the direction in which lay the greatest possibilities, he added, "Prospects for employment are good, especially in the northland."

For the ladies, too, he had a word of encouragement. "Companies will look to women familiar with flying terms and equipment to handle the office work." Therefore he advised young ladies to join the Aero Club.

As for Wop and Vic, adulation continued to be heaped upon them.

"We did very little after all," they demurred.

Their protestation was quite in vain. Business men's clubs sought them as luncheon guests, hostesses plied them with invitations, reporters from near and far sought to "write up" their story, letters from all parts of the continent streamed in to them, Fox News from Hollywood sent camera men to photograph them.

Right at home Commissioner Mitchell was quick to seize on the flight as the necessary pry to loose the taxpayers' purse strings. "No time will be lost," he planned, "in re-submitting to the burgesses the \$23,000 airport development programme turned down in December."

Now, argued its supporters, "those ten-thousand who went to Blatchford field to welcome Wop and Vic know the rough nature

of the ground. They have seen for themselves the inadequate housing, the restricted mean approach, the lack of lighting for planes arriving after dark."

"Why not," boldly insisted others, "increase the bylaw to a \$50,000 expenditure?"

While the problem was being pondered, and while the unsought praises still rang about the modest ears of the hero-flyers, the pair slipped quietly away and down to Los Angeles.

What with all the lionizing and the blaze of advertising they had inadvertently lit for their Commercial Airways Company, many were beginning to read the new writing on the wall.

Added to their feat was the northland pioneering done by Punch Dickins and others of the Western Canada Airways, by the flights arranged for personnel of the Northern Aerial Minerals Exploration Company, and of Dominion Explorers. There was in the Calgary area the work of the Great Western Airways sparked by the persistent enthusiasm of Captain Freddie McCall. And there was, here and there across the Dominion, a sprinkling of other concerns busy with trail-blazing across Canada's sky-ways.

Obviously, the long-overdue chapter to which the year 1928 had written a promising introduction, was about to unfold.

It was indeed to be a chapter of change, of development hitherto unguessed. Before the next year was to wing by, Edmonton, the small northern nucleus of a large farming community engrossed chiefly with packing plants, with grain elevators, with a hundred and one services to that stolid static community, was to try on a new gown.

She was to set her cap to capture a new love, customers of the far northern spaces, traders, trappers, prospectors, scientists, men whose needs she would supply through the medium of the wide-ranging airmen. She was to begin to know her destiny as a new-world kind of air Plymouth from whose harbour men would set forth to engage in schemes of commerce and voyages of discovery that would push her horizon north to the polar sea.



## 1929

THE SLEEK "SURPRISE" zoomed with an elegant air of disdain above the rough-shod field.

"There's little chance of dusting that bird with a machine gun." So bragged an observer as he craned his neck to watch Wop putting the new pride of Commercial Airways through her aerial paces.

This "surprise" was the outcome of the trip to California when Wop and Vic scurried off from all the lionizing after their epic safari to Fort Vermilion.

"It's like a giant orange cigar," described another onlooker as Wop swooped low over the crowd who had gathered at the airport to share the pleasure of the owners in the new aeroplane.

"Or like a giant fish," added another.

The plane, a Lockheed Vega, was a sister ship to that used in Arctic flying by Sir Hubert Wilkins, with whom Edmonton was presently to make acquaintance. It was the first really "modern" machine to be stationed in the city.

For, unlike the small Avian, it had an enclosed heated cabin and it was capable of carrying 4 passengers or a pay-load of 600 pounds. As well it had, of course, an undercarriage adaptable to wheels, skis, or pontoons.

It was a moment of triumph for Wop, a moment that had been ten years in the shaping. Now at last, with all the promises of business that should come with the spring's northward prospecting stampede, and with the whisper of a possible mail contract, at long last, his dream should come true.

Already from Winnipeg arrived news that the generous-hearted Santa Claus of western aviation, James Richardson, was not to be deterred from expanding his Western Canada Airways, even though the trial mail-express loop of the early winter had lacked sufficient support to lift it out of the red.

So, the week after citizens turned out in their thousands to cheer Wop May and Vic Horner home, they learned with equal pride that Punch Dickins was to fly the giant Fokker Super-Universal he had guided over the unknown Barrens back to the city. From here, he was to initiate a novel experiment, a winter air service into the north.

From the city, he was to push on to Fort McMurray, the post hugging the end-of-steel terminus at Waterways where Jack Caldwell and Doc Oaks had set up their base in earlier attacks on the fringes of the Barrens. Then from McMurray, on behalf of Western Canada Airways, Punch was to fling a fresh challenge to the northern hinterland.

"Maintaining their policy of expansion," came a news report ringing out names that were soon to become household words in the city's homes, "Western Canada Airways Limited, pioneers of aeroplane flights into pioneer lands, will commence a regular air service from Waterways to Chipewyan, Smith, Resolution, Hay River, Providence and Simpson, all of them important trading points on the water route to the Arctic.

"C. H. Punch Dickins, another of Edmonton's own intrepid air-men, will inaugurate and operate this most daring of northern plane services. And if any flyer," confidently continued the reporter, "can successfully carry through this new epic in commercial aviation, it is this same Punch."

Two trips weekly to Fort Smith and one trip weekly to Fort Simpson were first planned for this inaugural service. Planes were to carry mail, passengers, furs, express packages, and, as the agents and air crew were soon to discover, any and all of the assorted needs, animate or inanimate, that resourceful northerners might require.

Northern terminus of the new run was to be Fort Simpson, the remote post a thousand miles north of Edmonton on the Mackenzie that citizens had tried to picture through the eyes of Fullerton and Gorman eight years before.

Anxiously, the reporter went on to do his utmost to awaken the city's inhabitants, snug in their centrally heated homes, to a realization of what lay in store for pioneering Punch Dickins, his mechanic and his passengers. "Figure, if you can, that big Fokker, hurtling through Arctic skies, with flying temperatures of fifty or more degrees below zero, bucking the terrific winter tempests of that bleak and

frozen land, and carrying, with the regularity of a crack transcontinental train, passengers and express between points that today are weeks and weeks apart, with only the dog team between them."

Actually, the reality, on that first challenge to the northern winter, was much worse than anything a reporter could picture.

Stormbound briefly *en route* to Edmonton as he flew west from Winnipeg on the first leg of the inaugural flight, Punch was next held at Edmonton for two days by another blinding snowstorm.

Finally he zoomed from the city, only to be, within a half hour afterward, forced down on a farm field just twenty-eight miles outward on his route. Snow blowing into the carburettor at takeoff, it was decided, was the cause of the engine trouble. Back to the Blatchford field he was obliged to retreat.

Two days later, once more he lifted the great yellow and blue machine into the northern sky. Presently he found himself again heading into a blizzard, one of the worst of the season. He had to come down on the ice at Lac la Biche, less than halfway to his first goal at McMurray.

"Is there a snow hoodoo," the superstitious began to ask, "thwarting this flight?"

Next day with his passengers, T. J. Reilly, the postal inspector, F. W. Lundy who was to open a Western Canada agency at McMurray, and his mechanic, Lew Parmenter, at last he taxied down on the ice at the confluence of the Athabasca and Clearwater at what was to be the new sub-base, McMurray.

It was a frigidly cold winter day when he resumed this new "aerial assault" of the old water route leading to the Mackenzie valley. The thermometer registered forty-four degrees below zero as he pushed onward from McMurray. Aboard were Mr. Reilly, Lew Parmenter and 500 pounds of mail.

As the four-hundred horsepower engine roared forward from post to post, the party, like Gorman and Fullerton before them, "encountered all the vicissitudes" the unfriendly north can produce.

These vicissitudes, too, were again those offered by the sub-Arctic in the depth of winter, blizzards and blinding snow, fogs and extremes of temperature, hidden ice ridges and wind-buffeted expanses, unreadied landing-lanes and not as yet even nose hangars, all combining to offer the most inhospitable reception to the challenging Fokker, its pilot and mechanic.

On Great Slave Lake they smacked into a blizzard with a demon-driven wind sweeping over its immense platter to pack the snow in great drifts. At Fort Providence, on its western extremity, the first post on the magnificent Mackenzie, the temperature dropped to 62 below. They persisted on, through wind and storm, to their northernmost goal, Fort Simpson.

Returning with a first consignment of furs, at Fort Resolution on Great Slave, Pilot Dickins, like Gorman before him, suffered a landing mishap.

Exposed to the sweep of north-westerlies across the one-hundred miles stretch of ice, the shore here was piled with fantastic snow shapes above the crusted ridges of ice. Descending through swirls of blinding snow, the plane struck a treacherous thrust of ice, damaging undercarriage and propeller.

Labouring through cold and snow, mechanic and pilot contrived to make repairs sufficient to get them airborne again five days later. They continued their southward flight, skimming down again at McMurray just sixteen days and eighteen hundred miles after leaving Edmonton.

This time mishaps to machines were not to stop the projected service. From Winnipeg another Western Canada pilot, "Buck" Buchanan, flew a fresh plane to McMurray and guided the wounded bird home for overhaul.

Lengthy details of this aerial discovery voyage and this first flight of mail north on the Athabasca-Mackenzie route dwelt also upon the personal risks involved. "Louder howled the wind, lower dropped the temperature . . . But the mail was safely delivered at Hay River post and, after a fifteen-minute breather, the pilot took off again for Providence . . . Courage, determination and brains have won out in man's battle with the frozen north."

"Drivel," protested Punch upon his return to the city. "That was drivel about our taking our lives in our hands on that first mail trip."

Yet, laconically, afterward, he summed it up. "The toughest flight in my experience."

Flitting back to Resolution in another giant Fokker, he picked up Postal Inspector Reilly and a load of outgoing mail. Then, in two hours and forty minutes, he "burned up the air" over the 400-mile stretch back to McMurray.

Pressed to deliver an opinion about the possibility of establishing a regular mail route, the postal inspector was optimistic. "There's

no question about the feasibility," he replied, "of air mail service to the north. It's a case of working out a service that can be operated, in view of climatic conditions, and of having necessary hangars at landing-places."

Even at Fort McMurray, he said, the nose hangar had not yet been erected, and the plane had to stand out in the 46° below zero temperature.

Carrying on with the new service, from post to post Punch persisted with his flights. Soon he had earned from the Indians a new name. "The Snow Eagle," they called him.

Obviously acquiring, like that great bird, a sagacity learned from experience, he flew on and on. As he established everywhere new records for his company, he carried mail, he carried furs, he carried even fresh fruits and vegetables to customers who before perhaps enjoyed the taste of them only at ship-time in the brief summer season. And of course he carried passengers.

As he waited out storms and dodged fog patches, he summed up, "Unnecessary risks are foolish. Reasonable caution has to be observed in this north country."

At last, swooping northward in ever-lengthening loops, on March 6, 1929, he reached Fort Good Hope and made the first aerial crossing of the Arctic circle in central Canada.

From that point he brought out a "test" load of precious furs for the Northern Trading Company. This consignment, reaching the Winnipeg fur market within a few days, proved to be a key selling feature for air freighting.

"The shipment thus presented in its prime to the market," said Manager Leigh Brintnell with quiet satisfaction, "brought the company \$40,000 more than if it had come out, as had been the custom previously, six months later by boat. It was a great selling point for us."

During this period of directing aviation's spearhead farther and farther toward the Arctic, on one trip that month of March, Punch Dickins made the thousand-mile jump from McMurray to Simpson all in one day, on the way stopping five times to deposit freight to intervening points.

In the midst of all this record-breaking came joyous word to his home city. Punch Dickins had won the McKee trophy for the year 1928.

Proudly Edmonton citizens pondered the advances made in the less than three years since the donor of the award, the late Dalzell McKee, had paid them a visit on that trans-Canada flight. The citation announced the award to be for "the most meritorious service for the advancement of aviation in Canada during 1928," the climax of it being of course that story-book flight across the Dominion's broad "blind spot," the Barren Lands.

Modest and reticent as ever, Punch gracefully accepted all the tributes while still adhering strictly to the motto, "Let's get on with the job."

Pressed now again during the "break-up" season to speak at service club luncheons in his home town, he broke his habitual silence to plead the cause to which he was dedicated.

He had glimpsed the gleam. He could see the new world of trade and commerce lying to the North with Edmonton the main base of supply. If only he could direct the eyes of his cautious fellow-citizens toward its potentialities.

"Communities which will profit most," he prodded them, "from this new era in transportation are those which wake up earliest to its possibilities. In this way Edmonton has the opportunity to enlarge its trade area by thousands of miles."

His employer company, Western Canada Airways, he continued, in the year 1928 had carried more passengers and express than any other aerial transportation on the whole continent. It had aggregated a total of 9018 passengers flown and a total of 532,000 miles traversed.

Amazed at these statistics, then abashed by his next words, his hearers harkened soberly to his urgent utterances. This quiet young man stood before them with the poise of the adventurer who has seen a far new world unfold beneath his eyes.

"Go out to your aerodrome any day. Look it over. Ask yourself if it offers proper facilities for, say, thirty planes. I have seen as many as ten there at one time. It won't be long before there are five times that number."

Then, as soon as the spring break-up season was over and the great Fokker traded her skis for pontoons, Punch was off again.

Flying prospectors and trappers, officials and traders, freighting gear and groceries and mail, on mercy flights ferrying out the ill and the injured, he pressed farther and farther toward the polar sea.



His had been the first flight of an aeroplane to Snowdrift and to Fort Reliance on the eastern shore of Great Slave Lake. Swinging northwestward, his was also the first to Fort Rae, on one of the most northerly arms of the sprawling octopus known as Great Slave; his plane too the first to cross the Arctic Circle above Fort Good Hope.

Gradually he hurtled forward and outward. Finally, loaded with mail and express and accompanied by his faithful mechanic, Lew Parmenter, he reached the many-channelled mouth of the monster Mackenzie River.

On July 1, 1929, the mammoth Fokker floated gracefully down on the muddy water of the river outside Aklavik, the first aeroplane ever to reach a central Arctic port. The triumphant arrival of its first navigator, Alexander Mackenzie, in the age of the fur traders, was not more significant than this new voyage-ending, one hundred and forty years later, in the twentieth century age of aerial commerce.

The moccasin telegraph had got word ahead to Aklavik that the pair were to arrive. To give them a proper welcoming, three hundred Eskimos and a scattering of white folk lined the river shore.

This was quite different from the kind of reception Punch had received the previous year at Baker Lake and at other inland points. There, quaking with fear, the natives went scurrying into their tents at sight of the strange monster bird.

"We received a royal welcome," Punch smiled afterward in recollection of the Aklavik arrival.

"The Eskimos were expecting us and they came for miles in their schooners for the event. They lined up on the shore and weren't the least afraid of the aeroplane. I worked until after midnight," he chuckled, "taking them for short rides. I just couldn't satisfy them."

All this while, back home in Edmonton, Wop May and his flying friends were improving their acquaintance with local skyways. Definite reports from Ottawa indicated there was about to begin one or more regular northern air mail services as well as that one about to link the scattered prairie cities. A slice of these governmental contracts, it was argued locally, should go to Commercial Airways.

That is, if that company could secure enough financial assistance to equip itself for such a contract. Justifiably, that winter flight to Fort Vermilion had enlisted enormous good-will and sympathy for

its cause, and several more times that year, Wop, as well as Punch Dickins, was to wing forth on mercy flights to aid the ill and injured.

With spring had come a new stir and hum to the Blatchford field. Commercial Airways, confronted but not daunted by the competing giant Western Canada, continued to coax local air business. Captain Burbidge arrived to take over his new post as instructor for the Aero Club. Straightway he proved that his reputation as an expert was indeed well founded and under his capable guidance more and more pupils were added to the register and soon more and more fledgling pilots were taking to the air.

But in spite of the sharp words of Punch Dickins, the municipal air harbour itself, that spring of 1929, was definitely not in shape to foster civic pride.

Especially to strangers floating down from the blue, or worse still, from a wet clouded sky, the field was ill-equipped to give an hospitable welcome. If the visitors came by day, it was bad enough, narrow and rough and cramped by fences and fields. By night, it was a menace past belief.

Early in May came news that the city was to be again a stopping point on the flyways of the famous. Captain Parker Cramer was coming to Edmonton on his way home from Siberia.

One of the most determined and dedicated aviators ever to challenge the air over the most perilous places of the earth, Captain Cramer had, the previous summer in company with a fellow-countryman, B. R. J. Hassell, in an attempted flight across the Atlantic, been forced down on the Greenland icecap.

This time he was going to touch down at the Blatchford Field on his way home from a 12,000 mile flight from Wichita, Kansas, to East Cape, Siberia and return.

Finally on the evening of May 10th, word was flashed from Edson, ninety miles distant, that Captain Cramer's plane had passed overhead. Members of the Aero Club, which was then in charge of the Blatchford Field, rushed out to set up oil-flares and to beam automobile headlights on the ill-kept runway.

Out of the black Captain Cramer appeared. He circled the field, decided that the flares were marking out obstructions, and headed his machine toward a still rougher stretch that had been brushed but not yet cleared of roots. As he bumped his way toward the hangar, the jagged roots ripped punctures in the delicate fabric of the fuselage.

The stocky little flyer wasted no time bewailing the mishap. With

enthusiasm he spoke of this route to Asia that General Billy Mitchell's men had blazed nine years before. Like them, he had reached the same conclusion.

"We have proven," he said, "that this is the most feasible route to Asia from America. We reached Asia after a flight of some fifty miles over water. We weren't able to land, as we had no permit to do so. We circled East Cape."

Next, the knot of listeners gathered about him wanted to know more of that last year's projected flight by way of Greenland to Europe. Attesting also to the feasibility of that route, in which later years were to prove him right, he insisted to the crowd of Albertans who had turned out to welcome him, "I still firmly believe the Greenland route is the logical one."

The long hop back from Alaska to Edmonton, through fog, rain and snow, he and his companion, W. S. Gamble, had completed in ten hours' flying time.

"We had no real trouble with the motor," he added. "Our flight has demonstrated that the modern commercial aeroplane is reliable as a means of travel under almost any conditions."

Knowing, though only vaguely, of the awesome terrain he had skimmed, Edmontonians saluted his courage as they wished him godspeed over the remainder of the homeward lap.

Presently they were to learn that their daring new acquaintance was on the wing again. Once more, as co-pilot, he was embarking in a second attempt to follow that "feasible" route, from Canada to Greenland to Iceland and thence to Europe. Again his party was forced down, this time off Port Burwell on the lone northeastern tip of Labrador.

They were to follow his flying fortune on a third trans-Atlantic try when, in 1931 with a Canadian radio operator, Oliver Paquette, he set forth for the last time. Soon the plucky pair radioed that they had reached, almost, the coast of Norway. Thereafter there was silence.

Shamefacedly, this spring of 1929, recalling the accident to Cramer's plane, Edmonton's citizens resolved that something must forthwith be done about the hazardous conditions of their own airport. Before that something could be achieved, a fresh disaster struck.

Attempting to bring his Avian down onto the field, Pilot John Morgan of Winnipeg mistook a section of the old grainfield for a

runway. Suddenly, he found himself confronted by a barbed wire fence. As he tried to rise above it, he failed to clear a telephone pole. He severed the pole and of course damaged his machine badly.

"This fully proves," scolded Wop, "that the runways must be extended and properly marked. In my opinion, any stranger would have difficulty in making a safe landing."

Cy Becker, the Aero Club president, seconded Wop's words. "If the airport had been in proper condition," he added, "the accident would never have happened. The stranger sees a great expanse of green, and lands, not knowing there may be swamp or barbed wire."

If the city fathers needed further prodding, they had only to look at the log book for this first fortnight in May to find portentous augur for the future of their air harbour. In that period, visiting planes from Alaska, Oklahoma, Winnipeg, Calgary as well as forestry planes from High River en route to Grande Prairie, had contrived to get down.

When the giant from Oklahoma circled to land, spectators held their breath. It was a huge Travelair five-passenger-cabin monoplane bringing oilmen to survey prospects in the Canadian north.

As the American leviathan eased its weight down cautiously onto the green, the crowd pitched forward to get a closer look. It was the largest machine yet to attempt a descent at Alberta's capital.

For Edmonton folk and their airfield, the manager of the oil-company owning the plane, Grover Simpson, had some straight-from-the-shoulder words. "You've one of the finest air fields anywhere in the country," he first delighted them by announcing.

"But," he went bluntly on, "it's terribly rough. A little money spent now would spread the news that Edmonton has a fine landing-field. You've no idea how that message would bring in visiting planes."

Edmonton, obviously, was not only belying her famed spirit of western hospitality. She was endangering lives. So, by mid-May, council put its heads together.

Undoubtedly the citizens, awakened by these latest mishaps, by Punch Dickins' deeds and words, especially by that heroic winter flight of Wop May and Vic Horner, would now vote "Yes" in sufficient numbers to pass the airport bylaw.

To take a special plebiscite would cost the city coffers probably twelve or thirteen hundred hard-to-come-by dollars. To postpone changes to the air harbour was risking lives and diverting badly needed business elsewhere. So council members agreed to a new plan.

They voted to spend the increased sum of \$35,000 on the airport,

with work to begin immediately. The by-law authorizing the spending of such a large sum they would submit to the burgesses in November. There would be no doubt of its passing then.

At once men and machines tackled the project. They began to lay the foundation for a brand-new hangar. They cleared, drained and ploughed extended runways in preparation for levelling, seeding and rolling. Soon the Blatchford Field would wear a fashionable new look of maturity, indicating to all and sundry that she was leaving adolescence behind in this coming of age of aviation.

Every week now, in fact almost every day, new records of aerial achievement were being rung up to justify the city council's financial plunge.

To the Commercial Airways Company had fallen a heartening bonanza. This was a life-saving contract with the federal government at Ottawa to fly the mail to the Peace River country every Tuesday.

In preparation for the first flight, every detail was shaped to the peak of readiness. At nine o'clock in the morning of the 21st of May in this momentous year of 1929, Wop, as chief pilot for the company, roared off from the Blatchford harbour.

At home, his partners, Cy Becker and Vic Horner, were right on hand to nose out with the Avian on any other profitable venture. In the fuselage of the smart new Lockheed Vega were jammed a thousand letters, many of them special covers marking this first official air-mail flight to Grande Prairie.

As he raced uneventfully northwestward, he had time for a reminiscing thought or two.

It was nine years since he had first hazarded life and limb of himself and Colonel McLeod by steering the old *City of Edmonton* over the wilderness that knifed off the Edmonton area from the land of the Peace. Nine years of hoping and scheming and dreaming, of inadequate machines and inadequate flying fields, of a scoffing public who refused to recognize the dawn of the air age.

It was five years since he had put down in Grande Prairie with the forward-minded Adair, only to come repeatedly to grief as a pioneer too far ahead of his time.

Now, surely the air age had dawned in the Alberta sky, to blaze at last into the full light of day.

Subsequently events were to prove that this time he was right. As Lindbergh's bold defiance of the Atlantic had cinched the coming of that age for the populous and prosperous eastern areas of America,

so his and Vic's flight to Fort Vermilion and Punch Dickins' winter pioneering had contributed in large measure to usher it into the empty skies over Edmonton.

Three hours and ten minutes after leaving the city, in perfect summer weather, Wop eased the orange ship down at Grande Prairie. There was not a cloud in the sky nor scarcely a breeze stirring as, shortly, he began to bowl homeward again, with incoming mail delivered and outgoing mail stowed away in the fuselage.

Safe down at home-port, next day he hustled to make ready for another kind of record-breaker.

Winnipeg, that city so fortunate as to be the home of air-minded and wealthy James Richardson, had now progressed to the point of having its own air meet. This was to be held on May 24th and 25th and to be attended by both Canadian and American pilots. Wop and Vic decided to accept an invitation to be present.

Taking aboard as passengers Robert McDonald and J. A. La Fleche, Sr., at half past five in the morning of the 23rd, Wop set the Vega's Wright Whirlwind motor in motion. At two o'clock they taxied to a stop on Winnipeg's Stevenson field. Then they proceeded to have lunch, thus becoming the first business men to have had breakfast in Edmonton and lunch in Winnipeg on the same day.

During the 800-mile flight and during the demonstrations of the air meet the "orange cigar," the Vega, behaved creditably.

Her pilot, whose air record of between three and four thousand miles compared favourably with any of the other young men taking part in the more routine competitions, now distinguished himself otherwise as well.

Upon being invited to give a special demonstration of his flying skills, Wop borrowed a Gypsy Moth from the Winnipeg training club. Up sky, he proceeded to display the kind of manoeuvres with which he had stunned Alberta audiences after the World War. Again his Falling Leaf and spins and turns and sideslips made the sky ring with the applause of watching thousands.

Homebound, the Vega began to balk as he crossed Saskatchewan. Forced down near Rosetown, there he had to await repair parts needed to mend a broken rocker arm.

At home again, soon he was to receive tidings that would mark another epochal step in his career. His dream of an air service fanning northward, like that of the rival Western Canada Airways, up



to and beyond the rim of the Arctic Circle, was about to be realized.

His company had won the contract to carry the mail right to the shore of the Arctic Ocean.

Bolstered by generous promises of aid from the brokerage firm of Solloway Mills, Commercial Airways had tendered a strong bid for a slice of the pending government mail services. Now the news that the little company had won the northern contract meant a facing up to a tremendous fresh challenge. There would have to be a hundred plans laid, a thousand details seen to. There would have to be fuel caches piled in advance, landing-places scraped clear, and wherever possible, some sort of shelter provided for the machines from the bitter blasts of sub-zero winter days and nights.

"We'll use nose hangars for the machines at McMurray in winter," proposed Cy Becker. "It will hardly pay us to fly another three hundred miles farther south to get the poor accommodation provided here."

To match the magnitude of all the new chores the company planned to undertake, new planes were needed. So orders were hurried off for two brand-new Bellancas. These powerful machines were Canadian-built and equipped with 300 horse-power Wright engines. Furnished with a six-seated enclosed cabin, they were capable of a top speed of 130 miles per hour. And they cost the tidy sum of some \$26,000 each.

In that busy month of June, President Cy Becker took time to perform a pleasant duty for the Aero Club.

Under the crack tutelage of Captain Burbidge, the organization was standing firmly on its feet and was able to order two new Moth trainers. Together President Becker and Instructor Burbidge flew the yellow birds back from Calgary, where they had been assembled.

The day was a proud one for the Edmonton and Northern Alberta Aero Club. Now it had the largest roster of pupils and the largest training fleet in all the west.

While those determined to fly were thus going to be given a better opportunity to learn to do so, those who merely wanted to share the endless fascination of seeing a machine skim along the ground and then miraculously lift into the air, had, in that golden year of 1929, still many a treat in store.

With half a continent of untapped wilderness potentialities back of

them, there was obviously unlimited challenge for venturesome companies and venturesome pilots. While Punch Dickins was pushing back sky barriers to the far north for Western Canada Airways, the operations manager, Leigh Brintnell, guided another innovation down onto the Blatchford Field.

This time Brintnell was piloting a brand-new Junkers and he was bound for the site of a novel and enormous task. His immediate destination was the mountain-circled town of Prince George, where eight years before the Mitchell Alaska expedition had first set the valleys ringing to the roar of an aeroplane motor. Here Paul Calder as pilot for Western Canada Airways, Fred Little as chief aerial photographer, and Ernie Koppen as mechanic, formed a crew of three to take over the new plane and the new job.

For the next four months the trio were to engage in a natural resources survey of 5000 square miles of the rugged interior of British Columbia, particularly of the unknown area lying between the Pine and the Peace rivers in the northeastern part of the Province.

Next month the bustling Brintnell was back again on the Blatchford Field with the newest pride of his rapidly-expanding company. This time he piloted a mammoth three-engined Super-Universal Fokker, the very latest thing in flying-machines.

As he had that morning, en route from Winnipeg to Edmonton, flown over Wainwright Park, his plane had, he reported with a flash of smile, stampeded the buffalo herds there.

"No wonder," breathed the awed spectators, as they surveyed the three-motored giant. This stupendous visitor was the largest plane operating in the west and the second largest in all Canada.

Again Manager Brintnell was on a reconnaissance tour, checking arrangements for the operation of his company's machines, particularly checking the progress made in the erecting of night beacons and emergency landing fields for the proposed new prairie air-mail schedule. With him in the wonder plane flew a party of ten passengers, among them the Honourable John Bracken, premier of Manitoba.

After a brief stop in Edmonton, they were to fly on to Vancouver. Pilot Brintnell planned to make the first flight of its kind over the Crownsnest Pass in southern Alberta, thence on to the Pacific coast port and back to Winnipeg.

"I've made the trip through the northern pass," explained Brintnell. "Now I want to test the feasibility of the southern line,"

Mouths agape, the stay-at-home spectators watched how easily the ponderous ship climbed into the air and quickly became a tiny speck in the southern sky.

"Progress," they sighed, marvelling greatly.

Next day, a fresh treat promised.

Word had been wired that another Alaska-bound racer was going to make a quick stop-over in the city. Captain Ross Hoyt, a United States army pilot flying all alone in a Curtiss Hawk pursuit plane, was attempting to establish a new solo record for the hop to Nome and back.

If his plans worked according to schedule, those members of the Aero Club detailed to welcome and to help him at the city airport were going to lose some sleep. He was to leave Mitchel Field early on Thursday and to arrive in the city some time during the night.

As the grey dawn of Friday morning crept over the Blatchford Field, Cy Becker and the other watchers, including an oil company service crew, persistently scanned the southeastern sky. At last, at twenty minutes to five, their vigil was rewarded.

"There he comes," someone shouted.

A tiny moving speck in the eastern sky was fast swelling in size. President Becker rushed for the waiting Moth out on the runway. In a minute he, too, was airborne, zooming up toward the visitor to show him the way down to the landing-field.

"My name is Becker, Captain Hoyt," he introduced himself as he clambered from the Moth and strode up to meet the guest. "We want to do all we can for you while you're in the city. Is there anything we can get for you?"

"Thanks," the all-night marathoner replied drowsily. "I want this machine fixed up at once. I'll need about 210 gallons of gas. Where can I get some coffee?"

In a minute he was showing the service crew the five different gas tanks, where to drain the oil, how to put the fresh oil in. An American mechanic who was to have arrived to check the machine for him had so far failed to arrive.

Captain Wop May, he was assured, would come within a few minutes and could do all the testing and checking for him.

"Well, I guess that's all. But please," Hoyt insisted anxiously, "don't keep me here longer than one hour."

Then he allowed himself to be driven to a quick breakfast in a

restaurant. As he refreshed himself with coffee and food, in the friendliest fashion the affable pilot described his trip so far.

At half past two on Thursday, he had left Mitchel Field, which name reminded his hearers of that other Mitchell, whose dreams had brought Captain Streett and his Alaska-bound party all the way to the city and on to Nome nine years before. Captain Hoyt's flight schedule convinced his hearers that in the interval aviation, too, had come a long way.

His departure from Mitchel Field had been delayed, he said, "by moving picture men." He had had, he added with a grin, "quite a christening party. The boys were throwing ginger ale all over the old bus's nose."

Then, racing his Curtiss Hawk west to Minneapolis, he had stopped there for an hour. Into the evening dusk he had next headed north-westward over the darkening prairies toward Edmonton. Through the black of night and then through the wild fury of an electric storm he had hurtled on.

"How did you manage to find your way to Edmonton?" they wanted to know.

He had, he told them, with the breaking of dawn found himself over a little town with the words "Bruderheim Livery Stable" on a sprawling building. Bruderheim is a small hamlet thirty-five miles from Edmonton.

"I saw this big river and figured it was the Saskatchewan. Then I saw the railway tracks and I merely followed them in."

"What would you have done," someone asked, "if your aeroplane refused to function when you were travelling in the darkness over western Canada where you'd never flown before?"

"That's an easy one," the challenger of the lone skies answered lightly. "There's really little risk. I have my parachute strapped on. If the bus refuses to go and it looks as though I'm in some grief, I kiss her a fond farewell and land somewhere."

"There's only one break," he mused thoughtfully, "that might do some harm. That is, if I should land in water. I never was much good at swimming."

Within an hour and a half, he had clambered back into the sporty one-seater, his drinking bottles refilled with water and orange juice, his plane tanks re-loaded with gas and oil. The next hop was to be the hazard-packed stretch between Edmonton and Whitehorse, where death lurked in nearly every mile.

"I'll keep the bus up plenty high," he assured his hosts. "She's a grand little machine."

Poised ready to continue his venture, Captain Hoyt met his next delay. One after another Aero Club members gave a hand with the crank, which refused to turn over properly. It had balked, too, at Minneapolis, grumbled the impatient pilot.

At last Wop May grabbed the propeller and three club members grasped hands, forming a chain to hang on to him and to drag him to safety. Wop pulled hard down on the prop and, as she made contact and started to spin, the chain gang pulled him clear of danger.

Not only Captain Hoyt was blessed with superb courage, thought the little knot of bystanders.

A deafening roar cloaked their shouts of farewell. The Curtiss Hawk ripped down the runway, nosed up into the sky and swung westward toward the mountains.

With a prayer in their hearts, the little circle of watchers followed the machine as it quickly receded to a tiny dot in the brightening sky. Here, surely, was another Lindbergh pitting human endurance and mechanical ingenuity against unknown and mighty odds.

And here, surely, was this little harbour of Edmonton become a sort of air Plymouth waving adventurers out into the vast unknown.

Through the dark of Saturday night, again Aero Club watchers waited till the dawn.

Captain Hoyt planned to stop at Nome only long enough to refuel and to check the engine.

"I'll be back tomorrow night," he'd shouted as he tore off. "I'll wire you when."

So again, with flare-pots ready to light, the watchers hovered about the airport. Daylight of Sunday morning finally brought word. The American had been delayed but he had now left Fairbanks and should be in Edmonton that afternoon.

Thronging to the airfield all during the afternoon, hundreds of citizens joined the Aero Club members in scanning the sky for the man who, like a human comet, was surely taking a chapter out of a Jules Verne story.

As their vigil was prolonged into evening, at last came word of his whereabouts. From tiny Valemount, a whistle stop on the Jasper-Prince George line deep in the mountains, a message was tapped out to Edmonton. Captain Hoyt had been forced down in this secluded mountain valley almost seventy-five miles west of Jasper.

Now another new phase of the air age dawned for the capital city. Hurriedly the *Journal* got in touch with President Becker of the Aero Club. With his permission, they chartered a yellow training Moth.

Within minutes the machine, with the club's assistant flying instructor, Leroy Mattern, at the controls, was taxiing off and careening west toward the mountains. Riding in it was a reporter, Jack de Long, *en route* to get a first aerial on-the-spot account of Captain Hoyt's mishap.

Discreetly Pilot Mattern set the Moth down at Henry House, in the foothill region outside of Jasper. From there the reporter rushed forward by train on his twofold mission, to get the story and to discover what help Captain Hoyt needed.

Soon he was at the scene of the catastrophe. The pilot, he found, was not hurt at all. But the Curtiss Hawk, which had turned turtle on landing, was badly damaged. Captain Hoyt was still wearing that amazing air of nonchalance he'd shown all along.

"I didn't crash," he protested, as he proceeded straightway with the business of readying his plane to be crated up and shipped by rail back to the United States.

"I merely hit a soft spot and it just turned over."

Water in the gasoline, he thought, had been responsible for the engine trouble forcing him to find a landing spot.

Surveying the tiny confined area in which he had been obliged to come down, the reporter sent back a justifiably glowing account of his pluck and skill.

Shrugging off his newest achievement for Western Canada Airways, presently Leigh Brintnell, another blazer of untried trails, was back in town. This latest mammoth circuit he had completed was soon to bring the flying mineral age right to the city's back door.

With Gilbert Labine of the Eldorado Mining Company as a passenger, he had flown from Winnipeg to The Pas, to Waterways, to Fort Norman and across to Fort Franklin. From that post he began an aerial skirting of the north shore of Great Bear Lake, leaving Labine there to get on with the staking of copper claims.

He continued his circling of Great Bear, thus becoming the first pilot ever to circumnavigate the little-known inland sea. As he hustled along, his eye, practised by many previous expeditions with geologists and prospectors, noted the promising-looking formations along the east and south shores.



He was in a hurry, however, for at Aklavik he was due to pick up a government party, including Oswald S. Finnie, Director of the Northwest Territories. For several days at the Arctic port he waited out fog and then with his passengers headed southwest for the Yukon.

Soon he was over the mountains and down at Dawson, the first pilot to leap the great barriers between Aklavik and the famous gold-rush centre.

Leaving Mr. Finnie at Dawson, he roared on into the southwest, skimming over place after place famed in the Klondyke days and where heartbreaking problems of transportation had beaten the tough spirit of many a would-be sourdough. Over range after range of mountain he steered the Fokker, until he reached Prince Rupert on the Pacific coast.

There he met Andy Cruickshank, who was in charge of a new Western Canada base at that port and whose name was soon to become well known all over the northwest.

Touching down next at Prince George, he was shortly back again on the Blatchford Field, dismissing with a quick smile this latest accomplishment.

This grand circle tour when completed at Winnipeg would have logged at least 9000 miles. "All in the day's work," scoffed Brintnell.

Local citizens were trying to become blase too about those vast distances. They did want to hear, particularly, about the Yukon with which their city had forged, thirty years before, such an intimate link.

"The mountainous regions of the Yukon," Brintnell described, "were the most beautiful I have ever seen."

Sometimes, at that, during his great jaunt, he was not able to see much. In the Chilkoot pass, for instance, famed for its part in the gold-rush days, for a time his machine was swathed in fog and he was obliged to fly blind until "an opening showed me my whereabouts."

As for the earlier flight to and from Vancouver in the giant trimotor, it was, too, he agreed, quite successful. He had hopped from Vancouver to Winnipeg, with a single refuelling stop at High River, in the space of ten hours.

"My passengers wanted to know, when we flew back over the mountains, where we were going to put down. I didn't want to say, because I didn't know. It would depend on the weather. But I was determined, if possible, to get right through to Winnipeg."

Then from that gateway city of the prairies came to Alberta's

capital another official of his company, his mission too being to survey and to help establish increased facilities for their planes.

"Of course," assured J. A. MacDougall, when he was asked if Western Canada's large planes would use the Blatchford Field.

"Why shouldn't we?" he asked. "Edmonton was the first city in Canada to establish a municipal airport. They let this port lag behind a little." This, thought Wop May and his flying friends, was certainly the polite understatement of the year. "But they're improving it now. It'll soon be in fine shape for commercial flying."

Punch Dickins, he added, was to be the company's superintendent for the Edmonton district.

It was true that, out beside Portage Avenue, a much enlarged strip of John Hagmann's fields and pasture was being made carpet-smooth, and the pounding of hammers was added to the clang of machines working on the runways. The new hangar, large enough to house fourteen aeroplanes, was being rushed to completion.

As chief pilot for his company, Commercial Airways, Wop May was also hustling with all the supervising and administrative chores involved in establishing that first air-mail route to the Arctic. By river steamer, huge caches of fuel and other equipment must be shipped in advance to ensure its operating smoothly even in the depth of the Arctic winter.

Then, one day in early September, he took time out to perform what the *Journal* called "a new feat in newspaper and aerial history."

A large and important delegation of members of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce had left Edmonton by special rail cars on a visit to the Peace River country. An hour later, the last editions of the newspaper rolled off the *Journal* presses.

So that these prominent Canadians could keep in touch with the latest news happenings, the *Journal* chartered the sleek Lockheed Vega that was the pride of Commercial Airways. With a generous supply of newspapers aboard, Wop zipped off from the Blatchford Field and winged after the train. Overtaking it at Busby, a tiny stopping-point about thirty air miles northwest of the city, Wop dropped the red-hot news sheets down to the delegation momentarily pausing there.

Within forty-five minutes he had taxied to a stop again on the city's air harbour.

Wop was not the only one then to recall that it was barely ten years before that his former partner, George Gorman, with mechanic Pete Derbyshire, had pushed the old *City of Edmonton* south to Wetaskiwin on that first chartered news-toting mission.

While he had been in the city attending the Chamber conference, C. H. Wright, president of the Halifax board of trade, gave Edmonton a thumping aerial pat on the back. An up-to-date lighting system was being set up at the airport.

"The fact that Edmonton," beamed Mr. Wright, "is the first city in Canada to take definite steps to provide an electrically lighted municipal airport, even ahead of the big cities in the east, is an indication that the city is properly air-minded and that the citizens have a real spirit of advancement."

Readers, remembering that defeated bylaw of the past December, blinked doubtfully as they read these words.

1929—*continued*

PROUDLY WOP MAY joined the crowd of admirers who stood about the shore of the seaplane anchorage just east of Edmonton at Cooking Lake. The new red Bellanca that was to tackle the Arctic fastnesses gleamed sleek and shining at her mooring.

In four days Wop had guided her across the country from Montreal.

"It's acknowledged as the best performer for its size and value on the market," he told them. "It's the easiest handling ship I've ever flown."

Suddenly the spotlight whirled attention from the feats that Wop's company was about to accomplish to an aerial epic that was already being enacted. Even while Wop was ferrying the big Bellanca westward, Punch Dickins and several of his flying comrades were engaged in one of the greatest needle-in-the-haystack searches that Canada's northern empire has ever known.

In early September Colonel MacAlpine, the president of Dominion Explorers who had ridden with Punch in that first flight over the Barrens in 1928, had tackled a fresh undertaking. With a party of seven, in two planes, he had set out from Baker Lake on Chesterfield Inlet, high up on the drear northwest shore of Hudson Bay. Their next destination was Bathurst Inlet on the still more drear coast of the Arctic Ocean.

His pilots were both experienced men. Senior of the pair was Captain G. A. "Tommy" Thompson, whose flying dated back to the World War, who in 1922 had ventured by plane over the mountains to Vancouver and who had also that year undertaken to fly the Junkers *Vic* from Edmonton over the mountainous areas to Hazelton. He was in charge of a Fokker belonging to Western Canada.

Stan McMillan of Edmonton, the second pilot, had gone from flying at Camp Borden to northern work with commercial firms

four years before. In the considerable experience he had gained in north-central Canada were a number of flying "firsts," including a flight with Bill Broatch down the Coppermine River almost to the Arctic. He was at the controls of a Fairchild belonging to Dominion Explorers.

By September 21, the whole party was still unreported at Bathurst Inlet. The rest was silence. Planes and men seemed to have been swallowed whole by the sub-Arctic void, and the long Arctic winter and the longer Arctic night were fast approaching.

Quickly, a gigantic air search was organized. Everyone pitched in, with companies pooling men and resources to attempt a quick rescue. In charge was Leigh Brintnell of Western Canada Airways. Andy Cruickshank, who had now been brought from the west coast where he had gained a wealth of experience in northern British Columbia, the Yukon and Alaska, became chief search pilot.

Weaving a tremendous spider-web of sky pathways and setting up widespread caches of food and gasoline and oil, in all more than a dozen pilots and a half dozen planes were soon participating. The roster of distinguished flyers included, as well as Punch Dickens, Captain H. "Bertie" Hollick-Kenyon, Roy Brown, Bill Spence, Charles Sutton, Jimmy Vance and T. M. "Pat" Reid.

Like Amundsen who had undertaken to search for Count Nobile's polar party, these men and their mechanics risked lives and planes as they challenged all those northern "vicissitudes," which increase with the approach of the freeze-up season.

The watching public was beginning to learn what these were, bad weather and sudden blinding storms, freezing lakes on which pontoon-shod planes must land, fuel shortages, and the ever-imminent danger of becoming themselves lost in an area of 30,000 square miles, practically unmapped, a land mass approximating half the size of Europe or Australia.

On the rim of the ocean at Bathurst Inlet, waiting for a ride out with the MacAlpine party, was Colonel James Cornwall. Quickly Colonel Cornwall, the man known to the Edmonton and northern Alberta areas as Peace River Jim and to the Indians beyond as Pam O Chaces, "the traveller of distances," began to organize Eskimo search parties. In this he was joined by another celebrated northerner, Major L. T. "Lockie" Burwash. He, too, had been waiting for a lift out with Colonel MacAlpine.

Now as the pilots and their mechanics traversed thousands upon thousands of miles, in an ever-widening search, anxious citizens of Edmonton and Saskatoon and Winnipeg became growingly aware that the aeroplane was indeed making this vast sub-Arctic land a kind of suburbs of their own cities.

By the second of October Punch had, with mechanic Parmenter, in two days, made a dazzling flight from Fort Simpson to Coronation Gulf, a distance of 1500 miles and the farthest north flight so far in the central Canadian Arctic regions, excepting those of such polar flyers as Byrd and Wilkins and Amundsen and Nobile.

On Coronation Gulf he picked up a party of stranded prospectors waiting to come out with the MacAlpine flyers.

These men had waited in vain at a previously designated point of meeting up-stream on the Coppermine. Deciding, finally, to try to work out their own salvation, in their fragile canoes they had headed down-river north.

Striking a turbulent stretch as they neared the mouth, the men had lost their canoes and much of their gear. Scrambling ashore, with no proper clothing and no equipment to face the approaching Arctic winter, they believed the game was "all up."

Afoot, they wandered on down-stream, discovering next day, to their boundless joy, that they were within sight of a tiny post and mission on Coronation Gulf.

"Best of all," Geoffrey Gilbert, the leader of the party, recounted afterward, "we could see Punch Dickins' Fokker monoplane lying at anchor. Never was there more welcome sight to a man in this world.

"As luck would have it, we arrived just in time. Punch was planning the departure within an hour. The sight as we came round the bend of the river was like a reprieve for the condemned."

"An eagle of iron nerve and consummate skill," someone described Punch, as back in Edmonton his fellow-townsmen, with maps outspread, tried to track his flights.

Adding up the mileage by October 3, it was computed that the searching pilots had already flown 18,000 miles, more than the great Graf Zeppelin had chalked up in a first flight that it had just completed right round the globe.

Punch, it was estimated, "as unacquainted with fear as he is



familiar with the rock-girt wastes," had already winged over more miles almost than any other two of his searching comrades.

Then the hazard-filled in-between season began to creep over the giant lacework of lakes and rivers, laying a treacherous film of ice that would make landing impossible for pontoon-equipped planes and would not yet bear the weight of the ski-fitted.

Still there was not a trace of the vanished party. Save for the crackling of the forming ice and the wind whipping over the wasteland, there was still only silence.

Fearfully, men began to shake their heads. Had the north swallowed them forever, as it had swallowed Amundsen two years before? As long before it had swallowed Franklin and all his men?

The man who was already being called the "Lindbergh of the north" had his own theory to allay their fears.

"I believe," insisted Punch, "that they were forced down and that they've been frozen in."

The minute the ice was considered safe for landing, a bevy of machines, now ski-shod, resumed the needle-in-the-haystack hunt. Not a clue, not a sound, not a sign, was there to guide them.

Then on November 4, when hope was waning, came the word that was received with universal rejoicing.

On the Arctic shore at Bathurst Inlet the radio operator picked up a faint message relayed from Gjoa Haven on King William Land, where Franklin and his men were believed to have lost their lives.

The members of the MacAlpine party were all safe at Cambridge Bay on Victoria Island, some two hundred miles northeast of their intended destination.

Foul weather and a series of mishaps to the search and rescue planes delayed matters still further. It was December before all members of the party were brought "out" and full particulars of their cheating of death made public.

With gas running low, the party had had the bad luck to run into a snow-squall. They had become lost and put down on the edge of salt-water. There they faced the bleak knowledge that, with winter already laying about them the portents of her long siege, rescue might be a remote possibility.

Luckily they were befriended and assisted by a small band of Eskimos, without whose aid they would probably never again have

seen their homes in southern Canada. The Eskimos told them they were near Dease Point on Queen Maud Gulf, brought them food, and, finally, when the ocean had frozen sufficiently to bear their weight, they had led them in a nightmarishly painful trek across the sea ice to seventy-mile-distant Cambridge Bay.

Frozen in at this post was the *Bay Maud*, a ship which Amundsen had used years before. From its wireless a young operator sent word to a ship with a powerful radio set wintering near Gjoa Haven the happy words, "MacAlpine party arrived Cambridge Bay."

The whole near-tragic episode turned out to be one of those good-out-of-bad events that shape into the future. Out of the privations and suffering the party endured, out of the many mishaps and dangers the searching pilots and their mechanics incurred, the beacon of aerial progress blazed brighter than before.

"Ten years ago," the men were all agreed, "such a search would have been completely impossible."

New air mileage records were piled up, Andy Cruickshank's final total of 7000 miles travelled over surpassing even that of Punch Dickins. New areas of the immense sub-Arctic heard the first hum of aeroplane engines, and a cumulative aerial know-how was weaving together faster, weaving itself, for instance, right into the economy of the hinterland city of Edmonton.

Andy Cruickshank, chief pilot of the search, shrugged off his particular marathon with a smile, "We had to find them."

All the other pilots involved scoffed too at the eulogies heaped upon them by the press. "Only doing what we're paid to do," was their brief retort.

To reporter Allen Bill, Andy praised the wizard work of his mechanic, Alf Walker. "He nursed that bus until he had it eating right out of his hand," he told Bill.

In the later phase of the search, Andy's plane broke through the sea ice and was nearly completely submerged. Presently, under the direction of Air Engineer T. W. Siers, a later winner of the McKee trophy, a group of men combining all their skill and strength raised it and overhauled it and got it airworthy again.

Praising the toil and skill of all the mechanics, the "black gang" who kept the planes in the air, tersely Andy summed up, "But for the care of the black gang, death might have struck many times."

Briefly, Wop May too had joined the great hunt. "All the resources of Commercial Airways," officials of that company announced, "including the oil and gas caches from Fort Simpson to Aklavik, will be thrown into the search."

Then, with time running short, Wop had to turn again to the gigantic air-mail project his company had undertaken.

Backed by the Solloway Mills brokerage firm, his company now had a \$200,000 investment in planes and equipment and Wop was determined to make good. Officially, the newly-enlarged company was incorporated by Cy Becker, the general manager, and John Michaels, a prospering city business man, with a capital stock of 300,000 shares.

First Cy and Wop arranged for a quick test flight while the Bellanca still wore her pontoons. So loaded was the big ship with mail and baggage that Manager Cy had to stay behind. Accompanied by the postal superintendent, F. X. J. Leger, and by the mechanic, Tim Sims, on the morning of October 7 Wop set forth from Edmonton's seaplane base at Cooking Lake.

This trial flight, looped stage by stage as far as Fort Norman, was completely successful. The regular Arctic mail flights were to begin as soon as ice forming on the landing-bases on the lakes and rivers would be sturdy enough to bear the weight of the loaded planes.

Hours after Wop returned, with a mileage of 4700 piled within the past fortnight, he was on the wing again. This time he was called to rush medical aid to a woman near death at Keg River, 130 miles beyond Peace River town.

Within the city, at the Blatchford Field there was bustle too as final touches were being added to give the harbour its new autumn look.

Four two-hundred-foot-wide runways had been extended to 3500 feet in length, these runways being mapped out in different directions to suit the prevailing wind conditions. In all, two hundred and forty acres were now levelled for airport use and council set aside a further reserve of forty more acres for future needs.

Soon a bright blaze of electric light would replace all the tiny blobs of yellow from the oil-pot flares. In preparation for the new air-mail programme, the federal government had contributed \$5000 toward equipping the field with adequate floodlighting and with an immense beacon to guide the pilots home.

"Keep up the good work," urged the director of civil aviation, J. A. Wilson of Ottawa, as he paid an approving visit to the nation's first municipal air harbour.

Captain Keith Tailour would have thrilled to his next words. "The site is about the best I've seen anywhere.

"The average citizen," sadly admitted the director, "is not air-minded. But the wartime pilots were ready to give their lives and experience to the development of peacetime aviation.

"Keep Edmonton air-minded, and this city will, because of its splendid airport site, stand in the forefront of civil aviation in the years that lie before us."

Contributing to the "air-mindedness" of which Mr. Wilson longed to see more, that same mid-October week Paul Calder and Fred Little arrived back from their novel aerial choring in northern British Columbia.

"We've had a remarkable summer," reported Paul, "and the country over which we were working was a most interesting one. It was just like leaving home to quit our snug little camp at Moberly Lake."

During their vast survey, they had been based also at Hudson Hope and at Summit Lake. Little then could anyone guess that subsequent events within a dozen years would focus the attention of the whole continent on the unknown area with which these men now had been making a first acquaintance.

Part of the time also, Paul added, they had spent ferrying passengers and freight still farther north. Everywhere their big machine was viewed as a kind of monster from Mars. Even at Hudson Hope the sight of the tremendous metal bird was the event of the century.

"There was great excitement," grinned Paul, "when the huge Junkers sat down at Hudson Hope. We were given a real welcome and the people there did everything to help us and make us feel at home."

As years before—back in '98 and again in 1920—Edmonton ears buzzed with all the talk of mineral and oil strikes, in this new aviation era they were jug-wide to hear all the diverse rumours suggesting marvellous mineral finds.

"No," Paul had to disillusion them. He had no particular news

of any lucky strikes in the enormous area he had traversed. "For the most part," he said, "prospectors are going farther north."

Next the Alberta government decided, too, for some aerial surveying and Paul flew the Junkers back northwest into the Peace River country. Fanning out from High Prairie, Fred Little was to do photographing to help determine the route of a proposed provincial highway from High Prairie into the Sturgeon area.

With the approach of winter his employer company, Western Canada, was going to station three aeroplanes, two Fokker Super-Universals and one Standard Fokker, at the Blatchford Field. Commercial Airways was going to operate at least three machines. Obviously, what with all the activities promising for the winter and the expected northward rush envisaged for the next spring, the superintending of the port could no longer be carried on the shoulders of the Aero Club.

At last, as Jimmy Bell had predicted, the city of Edmonton was going to need a harbour master. At last, there was a possibility that that ten-year-old dream of his might be fulfilled.

The novel appointment-to-be was properly advertised. Among the applications received by the civic officials was one tendered by Jimmy Bell.

Inside the new hangar two brand-new Bellancas and the Lockheed Vega idled in readiness. Step by step all the plans for the attack upon the fastnesses of the north had been completed.

This new air-mail service was to be the longest and most northerly air-schedule in the world, and every precaution was being taken, every contingency explored, to ensure its successful operation. Only the weather would remain, as ever, completely unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Recognizing the all-powerful part it might play, the planes, furnished with comforting heating systems, were stocked with full emergency supplies, with sleeping bags, with rifles and ammunition. Outfitted like polar explorers, pilots and mechanics were equipped with full northern dress of woollens and mukluks or moccasins and richly furred parkas. And along the route, Wop had directed the strategic placing of equipment and of giant caches of gasoline and oil to fuel the machines.

Immediately the unpredictable element in the minutely-planned campaign began to show its hand. A series of raging blizzards gripped the entire northland and held the big ships stormbound at Edmonton.

With the weather playing such delaying tactics, it began to appear that two important events were to make history together.

The day of the annual election was fast approaching. Clerical workers were preparing for the balloting for civic officials and for a series of money bylaws, including that rejected airport bylaw.

To plead the cause of the bylaw, Punch Dickins was persuaded to address a Rotary Club luncheon. Modestly he acknowledged the deafening ovation that greeted him when he was introduced.

"Pass the airport bylaw," he urged. Again he reminded them of a former prophecy, "Edmonton will be the air centre of the west."

"Within three days after the building of your new hangar," he continued, "all the available space in it was rented. You could build another right now," he predicted, "and it too would soon be filled to capacity."

Figures that sounded fantastic were quoted by Jimmy Bell when he spoke for the same cause at a Kiwanis Club luncheon. There were to be soon, he computed, "aeroplanes worth a total of two and a quarter million dollars housed in the airport." Twenty-two new pilots, he added, had been trained by the air club during 1929. A gleam of comfort to the more tight-fisted ratepayers was lighted by Commissioner Mitchell. The city's air harbour, he calculated, had netted a nice surplus of \$1500 on the year's operations.

Shortly before the day of balloting there came, to air-concerned circles, the most alarming news. Calgary citizens, in an election that had been scheduled shortly before that of its northern rival, had turned down a bylaw proposing to spend the sum of \$50,000 to improve their municipal airport.

This bleak bit of information the newspapers of the capital city quickly turned to advantage. The news that Calgary had turned a deaf ear to the pleadings of aviation they used as the final spur on Edmonton readers.

Apparently the rival city of Calgary, the cowboy city, the Stampede city, was going to stay with its colourful but slower cow-town ways.





Whirling around the world, the white *Winnie Mae* puts down in the ooze at Edmonton.

Left to right: Jimmy Mattern, Captain Jimmy Bell and Nick Greener, returning home from Alaska with bear cubs "Tokyo" and "Apollo" in the huge Ford tri-motor after the failure of the fueling-in-the-air scheme which was to enable Colonel Reg. Robbins to fly nonstop to Tokyo.



Frank Hartley records a solemn moment as Matt Berry (*right*) stands beside Fl.-Lt. Sheldon Coleman and Aircraftsman J. A. Fortey whom he has just found after thirty days missing.

On the shore of Point Lake in the subarctic Barrens, Berry and Hartley anchor their plane beside the lost machine in which Coleman and Fortey had been forced down.

"Calgary turned down the airport bylaw," chuckled the *Journal*. "Think what that means. Just two hundred miles north, and two hundred miles means nothing in this age of aeroplanes, will be a modern airport in Edmonton.

"Pass the airport bylaw and the aeroplane will pass Calgary in a cloud of dust."

At last, at noon on Sunday, the day before the election, impatiently the mail planes roared off into the northeast.

Leading the party, Cy Becker, general manager of the company, was at the controls of one of the brand-new Bellancas. Soaring up behind him to a 5000-foot height in the clear frosty air was Idris Glyn-Roberts, who was also a former world-war pilot and who was guiding a second Bellanca. In third place rose the Lockheed Vega, piloted by Captain Burbidge.

With the planes rode, as spare pilot, Archie McMullen, a young giant who had learned to fly in Calgary under the tutelage of Captain Fred McCall and Captain Jock Palmer of the Great Western Airways and who had served as air engineer with that company. To supervise the behaviour, under sub-zero conditions, of the Canadian-built Bellancas and their Canadian-built Wright engines, Tim Sims, a Wright engine specialist, accompanied the flight.

To supervise the setting-up of the postal services, Major Walter Hale, who was soon to earn the title of "flying postmaster," was another passenger. And to send back "stories" of the history-making flights a news reporter, Frederick B. Watt, also accompanied the party.

This prospect of a winter mail service right to the Arctic posed, especially to the old-timers, the prospect of staggering changes that were difficult to envision.

As he watched the triplet giants lift themselves and their loads into the bitter-cold sky, Kenny Blatchford, the flying ex-mayor and member of parliament, recalled those days when, as a lad, he watched hundreds leaving Edmonton bound for the Yukon.

"It doesn't seem so long ago," Kenny reminisced, "it's only thirty years at that, when I watched the boys pulling out from Edmonton in the rush of '98. Some of them got through, but it took them anywhere from a year to fourteen months. Here are these chaps

off for a destination equally remote, who'll probably do it in as many days."

Then Kenny took another squint at the three dwindling dots in the northern sky and remembered the very different means of transportation back in '98.

"Dogs and burros were used by most of those who started out. One Chicago party had the idea of constructing a steam train. They worked for several days building a dining-car, sleeping-car, cook-car, baggage-car. All the town turned out to see the 'train' pull out. It never left the lot. And few of those who left ever got farther than Hudson Hope or Dunvegan."

Flying-enthusiast Blatchford knew there was one other old-timer of the Edmonton district for whom this inauguration of a flight to the polar sea must have a deep significance. It was, of course, the celebrated Colonel Cornwall, "Peace River Jim," the man who had for thirty years preached the possibilities and the potentialities of the northland.

"To see those planes going," mused Kenny, "there's only one man, Colonel Cornwall, who must have got a greater thrill than myself. Way back in '96, Cornwall packed the first mail to Peace River and Hudson Hope on his back. Only one trip a year was made in those days."

Again, as in the days of Mackenzie and Hearne, the route to be followed now was the all-water or all-ice one, the Athabasca and the Slave rivers, Great Slave Lake and the monstrous Mackenzie itself.

Awaiting the expedition at McMurray were Wop May, a third Bellanca and five tons of mail, most of which had been shipped ahead by the meandering rail line to the end of steel at Waterways.

With deep satisfaction Wop, watching from the sub-base, saw the three planes settle safely down to a perfect landing on the snye, the broad channel between the shore and the island that marked the confluence of the Athabasca and the Clearwater rivers.

Now, counting the machines of Western Canada Airways operating under the supervision of Punch Dickins, seven planes rested on the ice-shod snye. And in the shedlike depot, that staggering five tons of mail, much of it first covers contributed by philatelists the world

over, waited to be wafted through the winter sky. Because of the abundance of these first covers, much of it would straightway have to be whisked south again.

Thirteen mail calls, Wop and Cy planned, were to be made between McMurray and Aklavik.

Next morning, the ninth, as early voters in the city began to flock to the polls, the little sub-station began to bustle with unaccustomed activity. Each of the planes must be thoroughly prepared. All of the organizing details must be perfected to the nth degree. Every precaution must be anticipated so that, weather permitting, the service would be established without hitch.

Then, on Tuesday, as citizens anxiously picked up their newspapers and twiddled their radio dials, they learned that the new era had been ushered in. The airport bylaw had passed by a more than comfortable two-thirds majority. And the winter mail service into the north had begun.

That morning, Cy Becker and Wop May, piloting two of the red Bellancas, had set off for Fort Chipewyan. Following the Athabasca north to its mouth at Lake Athabasca, they crossed the western tip of the lake to come down on the smooth ice of the north shore at Chipewyan, a post famous in fur trade annals.

Here, where Alexander Mackenzie had laboured as fur-trader and set forth by canoe on his epochal journeyings, all the residents of the little post rushed out on the ice to hail the aeroplanes, and to haul the sacks of mail into shelter.

While the two pilots partook of a hurried lunch, out on the ice in the sub-zero cold Archie McMullen and Engineer Sims toasted the engines with blowtorch heating rigs.

Then the men picked up the outgoing mail, piled back into the planes, turned their noses southward and at ten minutes past three in the afternoon swooped down again on the river snye at McMurray. This first loop of 320 miles they had successfully circled in less than five hours.

"So you've been to Chipewyan for lunch?" muttered an old-timer. "Well, well."

There was something very expressive, noted the reporter, "Ted" Watt, in the way he rubbed his chin as he muttered those words.

Only one hundred years, he may have mused on, since Chipewyan's factor, Alexander Mackenzie, had set out on his voyages of discovery.



Like Mackenzie and his men, May and Becker and Glyn-Roberts and their mechanics were hourly going to be confronted with all sorts of unexpected and almost insuperable obstacles in this new invasion against the giant northland.

For Major Hale and all the men involved, the great bulk of the mail alone presented, in establishing this rudimentary service, one of the heftiest of all the unprecedented problems to be tackled. Because a considerable part of this mail comprised philatelist covers, there would necessarily be a large consignment too for the return journeys.

So great as to be almost inconceivable to those back at home following, night by night, the progress of the flights were the vast distances to be spanned between posts.

Ferrying back and forth with load after load, the planes moved on to use Fort Resolution, the historic post on the south shore of Great Slave Lake, as a distributing centre. Slowly the Bellancas, christened by Reporter Watt "The Red Armada", battled forward.

Each of the three, before this first huge consignment was all distributed, marked up a record of almost five thousand miles traversed. Aklavik, the final goal in the chain of thirteen posts to be thus linked, was, following this circuitous "water" route to the Arctic, 1800 miles distant from the home port of Edmonton.

Winter, the bad actor in the great drama being enacted, showed its ugliest temper. Blizzards, fogs and far-below-zero temperatures hampered or held up completely the projected flights. Doggedly the mechanics followed the bleak routine that Lew Parmenter, so often assisting Punch Dickins to pioneer in his forward-hurting Fokker, already knew well.

That daily schedule included, if the stop at a post was to be an overnight one, draining the engine oil and shrouding the noses of the machines in a protecting wrap, jacking the skis clear of ice to prevent their freezing in through the night, and perhaps taking right into the bedroll any precious perishables entrusted for special delivery.

Pre-dawn hours were reserved for the really mettle-testing chores. These included the heating of the engines with blow-torches while keeping fire extinguishers in one hand, toasting of the oil over a



nearby fire and generally working about the plane's freezing pieces of metal that almost bit chunks right out of benumbed hands.

Stage setting for these duller bits of the drama being played was like as not an unsheltered stretch of wind-swept lake or river.

Despite all the obstacles, the great project progressed. More slowly than anticipated, for Wop had hoped to reach Aklavik at least before Christmas day. Determinedly they thrust forward, onward and upward through a frozen land to the frozen top of the world.

It was the twentieth of December before the last of these five tons was picked up from McMurray. It was December 23rd before Wop was able to take off from Fort Simpson, where he had been blizzard-bound.

There still remained deliveries to be made to Wrigley, Fort Norman, Fort Good Hope, Fort McPherson and Aklavik. And pilot Glyn-Roberts had to double back to Resolution for the final load of that first consignment.

As these last eight hundred miles were not served by wireless, the thousands following, by newspaper and radio, the advance of the "Armada" had now to wait, just as the patient north was always waiting, for word of its success, or failure, in reaching the final destination.

The year 1929 was all but gone before they were to know. On December the twenty-seventh, two Bellancas, piloted by May and Glyn-Roberts, achieved the major miracle. Out of the forty-below-zero mist swathing that far northern sky, they roared down to a stop on a channel mouth of Mackenzie River by the Arctic post of Aklavik. Streaked with frozen oil and plastered with sooty frost, the conquering aeroplanes were thus the first ever to reach the port in the depth of winter.

In addition to those who flocked to watch Punch Dickins land, came a horde of other stone-age people, combining their annual Christmas holiday with this new treat, the hailing of these new wonder-birds from the remote distances.

Back home, on January 3rd, Wop and his comrades were blithely welcomed with a ringing chorus of whistles and cheers. The goal that Punch had reached at midsummer, Wop, whose company had

pocketed the mail contract, had now likewise reached in mid-winter, not quite a full year since he and Vic Horner had been hailed home from their triumphant jaunt in the little Avian.

From then on, citizens began to read more matter-of-factly almost daily reports such as the following: "Blinding Snowstorms Delay Mail Trip to Aklavik," or "Air Mail Reaches Arctic Rim," or even "Aklavik—Chile in Two Weeks."

This last, of course, was as yet pointing out only a possibility. But now, smiled the newspapers, that Edmonton's Commercial Airways had established a winter route to Aklavik, it should, within a matter of months, be only a matter of routine to mail a letter from that Arctic post and have it reach Santiago in Chile, 12,000 miles distant, in the space of a fortnight.

To old-timers, to Kenny Blatchford, to Colonel Cornwall, and to many another who knew the north, its problems and its potentialities, these flights were nonetheless a head-shaking marvel and the dawn of a great new day.

Piled on the staggering accomplishments of Commercial Airways' men were the equally amazing achievements of the pilots and the mechanics of Western Canada Airways. Though they had lost the northern mail contract to their Edmonton rivals, they continued to build up their all-year service into the Mackenzie valley. Assisting Punch Dickins in this, at the controls of a second Fokker, was pilot Harold Farrington, who in central Canada had already acquired a taste for aerial pioneering.

Freighting in such delicacies as six hundred pounds of turkeys for Christmas dinners, and in warmer weather even fresh fruits and vegetables, bringing out passengers and furs, they spelled the new kind of commerce to the north. In one week alone, a report noted, the pair of Fokkers pushed four tons of cargo through the winter skies. "In steady hops from post to post they moved passengers, express, freight, on mercy flights ignoring storm and bitter cold."

As pioneer and senior operator, Punch Dickins, operating in the Mackenzie River valley with his mechanic Lew Parmenter, had within twelve months rung up a mileage of 74,630. Dazedly his

fellow-citizens at home got a fresh glimpse and a fresh understanding of northern geography as they followed a summarized report of his movements in that first year:

His azure blue plane has travelled from Edmonton to McMurray, Chipewyan, Fort Smith, Resolution, Providence, Simpson, and on to Aklavik, Coppermine, Coronation Gulf, Bathurst Inlet, Dease Point . . . He has covered a distance nearly as great as three times round the world.

In two long searching flights for the MacAlpine party, he has flown from Great Bear to Lake Providence, Point Lake, Red Rock and the headwaters of the Coppermine and then again to Fort Reliance, Walmsley Lake, Clinton Colden Lake and Aylmer Lake, along the Back River to Beechey Lake and up to Bathurst Inlet.

He has converted the vast Mackenzie territory to air-mindedness, to a new way of living. Trappers, traders, prospectors, have all taken to flying as his passengers.

Working in the open on the durable Fokker, on more than one occasion Lew Parmenter got his toes and fingers frostbitten.

"Part of the job," grinned Lew who was, as the report added, "as modest as the pilot."

Arriving home, too, that first week in the new year, the "flying knight of the north" had, in making his way through a blinding snowstorm between Fort Resolution and Reliance on the far eastern tip of Great Slave Lake, narrowly missed great cliffs that were almost invisible in the swirling clouds of white.

Then, very much visible, were great herds of caribou.

"Did they stampede," he was asked, "when you flew over them?"

"No," replied Punch. "They just kept going. They seemed to move about three to four miles a day, eating on the way. They didn't pay any attention at all to the ship. It was a wonderful sight.

"Everywhere you looked, you saw caribou grazing. What they found to eat is one of the world's mysteries. They were contented and apparently had sufficient of everything."

Also displaying the kind of stamina that went with the job, pilot Harold Farrington had, that same winter, a prolonged taste of true Arctic atmosphere. He was flying south from Fort Good Hope when he was forced down by lack of fuel.

Mushing on foot through bitter weather, after forty miles he reached Fort Simpson. There he loaded some gasoline onto a dog sled and within twenty-four hours was hustling back to his plane.

Quickly resuming his journey, he brought out an injured passenger, the mounted policeman Corporal J. D. Cummings, who had been badly burned when he tried vainly to save the life of G. Herodier, Hudson's Bay manager whose post at Good Hope had burned to the ground.

At Resolution, the mountie was transferred to a plane piloted by Punch Dickins, who finally succeeded in getting him into hospital at Edmonton.

"He was in bad shape, but he never complained all the way down," admired Punch. "It took us six days to get him there, but by dog-team it might have taken six weeks."

So again another year was ending. Again it signified not endings but more beginnings, more aerial discoveries and more aerial commerce sparked by a fresh copper strike and a fresh silver strike and by the strange new words, radium and uranium.

Above Alberta's northern boundary line, the sixtieth parallel of latitude, a great new mineral empire to be known as "the empire north of sixty" was beginning to take shape.

## 1930

WITHIN THE CITY that was beginning to call itself the gateway to the northern empire, a new post was being created.

On February 4, 1930, came the word to Jimmy Bell, the word he had been so long awaiting.

"The job is yours."

Next day, happily, he read the printed confirmation in the press. "Captain James Bell has been appointed manager of the Edmonton airport."

Since the forming of the air club more than two years before, he had been helping out where he could to further its work. Now the city was going to take over from the club the administration of the air-field, and Jimmy would be fostering the cause of flying in a role that was completely novel to himself and to his employers, the citizens of Edmonton.

Quickly he concluded his work in the pensions branch of the Alberta government and set up a small office upstairs in the new hangar that had yet to have added all the finishing touches.

Even as he began to familiarize himself with the duties of an air-harbour manager, another first was in the shaping. At last the federally-subsidized prairie air-mail service was to begin.

To Western Canada Airways the contract had been awarded. In readiness, Harold Farrington was transferred from the Athabasca-Mackenzie run and Walter Gilbert was to replace him in the north.

Gilbert, another world-war pilot, had already had extensive experience that had taken him even to the mountainous regions of Alaska. Now he was to begin ringing up new records for himself as he worked northward with Punch.

With complete nonchalance, many of the northern Indians, like the Eskimos, had come to accept the flights of the man they called "The Snow Eagle." At this point Punch was commissioned to

guide his big blue ship into a new area, where once more it struck terror to the hearts of the aborigines.

Skipping over forest and mountain into northern British Columbia with trading-post inspector A. L. Sawle,—father of another famous Edmonton pilot, North Sawle,—of the Northern Traders Company, he swooped down by a remote settlement on the Snake River.

There, he said, he was regarded as a courier of vengeance to the terror-struck natives who saw him drop down upon the ice.

“The outpost manager alone,” he added, “comprised the welcoming committee that greeted us. We were messengers of death sent by the Great Spirit to destroy those who had not been good. Old men and young women and children alike had taken to the bush. Some had crawled into dog kennels for protection after hearing and seeing the Fokker circle overhead.”

In the course of this air-safari, he visited equally remote Fort Nelson at the junction of the Nelson and the Liard rivers, another post that twelve years hence was to witness one of the greatest mechanization feats the world has ever known.

Now as Punch soared above, its majestic stretches of wilderness forest and formidable rock-pile were throbbing forth their very first echoes of an aeroplane engine. When he again anchored down at the Snake River settlement, two older Indians ventured near the river to gaze, from a safe distance, at the magic machine. Others took up viewpoints from the sheltering river bank. “As soon as the motor started, they all beat it again.”

Of course, he reminded his Edmonton hearers, in that area even the sight of a white man was to them a comparatively unusual experience.

From the still-novel sorties of Punch Dickins, attention was next concentrated on the business of establishing the prairie mail route.

By late February, under the anxious supervisory eye of Captain Jimmy Bell, everything at the Blatchford Field was organized like clockwork to ensure its smooth operation. Only the vagaries of the weather, as with the establishing of the northward services, were beyond supervision or control.

Straightway that bad man of the show began in the very first act to play out his lines. An initial flight out of the city on Monday, February 24, was intercepted by wicked weather. Pilot Milton



Ashton, flying one of Western Canada's Fokkers, got as far as Wainwright, by the famed buffalo park, when low cloud and threatening snow forced him down to fifty feet above ground.

He turned back and, through Tuesday, waited out the storm. Early Wednesday, he tried again. Again he was turned back in the Wainwright area, this time by fog. In the afternoon, he tried a third time and finally won through to Battleford and to Saskatoon.

At Edmonton there had been insufficient snow for skis but now, at these Saskatchewan centres, he encountered deep snow and landing with skis would have been much easier. Completing the mail circuit, that same day pilot W. N. Cumming arrived from Regina with the first west-borne sacks.

On March 1st, the regular daily service began. Promptly at 12:15 noon an Airways plane bowled down the runway and soon citizens were each day checking their watches and clocks with the departure of the "mail runner."

Weather, of course, continued to plague the path of the pilots. While they reported "least trouble at Edmonton due to weather," less than a fortnight after the beginning of the mail run, that trouble-maker made an evil thrust at pilot Conway Farrell.

A gale wind of sixty-five-miles-an-hour velocity, with snow, forced him back to Regina after an unsuccessful attempt to fly to Saskatoon and Edmonton. Coming down at the queen city of the prairies, the big Fokker was caught fast in the embrace of a violent gust and turned completely turtle. From underneath the huge machine, Con scrambled out unscathed.

Farrell was a slight chap who had first shown his mettle in World War One, who at eighteen had been summoned to Buckingham Palace to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross, and who was to know many another piquant taste of danger in the years to follow.

Undeterred, the mail-fleet carried on. Soon the sight of these lonely pilots, winging their way across the windswept trackless prairies, was to stir many a lonely heart below. From would-be pen pals they began to receive stacks of fan mail and flattering requests for autographs and photographs.

Weather again did its best to foil plans for another unique sortie to be undertaken by Punch Dickins. At Big Lake outside Edmonton, where nine years earlier the Imperial Oil's Junkers had lumbered

up into the sky, skis were fitted onto the Fokker Super-Universal.

Within the plane was rigged up a short-wave radio set for transmitting and receiving messages, the first to be carried on a machine bound for the distant Arctic's rim.

This new marvel was arranged for by that fur-trading association of adventurers, the Hudson's Bay Company. Two inspectors in its employ were now going along with Punch as passengers. They were R. H. Bonnycastle, who was in charge of the company's western sub-Arctic district, and W. A. Gibson, whose supervisory duties lay in the eastern portion and who was now bound for Fort Hearne at the mouth of the Coppermine River.

All went well until the party reached Fort Norman, where they became stormbound with a vengeance.

"At the height of its ferocity," Punch described on his return, "the gale varied from forty to seventy-five miles an hour. It completely swept away the snow in the open, piling it up in huge banks between sheltered spots. Old-timers had never before experienced such a hurricane. For an entire week it continued without a break."

Eventually, the plane got through, duly discharging passengers and freight, and establishing the undoubted usefulness of ship-to-ground radio. At isolated Fort Hearne, they picked up J. Reeves, a prospector who was to have been flown out the previous autumn by the Mac-Alpine party. He had given up his place on a rescue plane to Bishop Gabriel Breynat, who was ill.

Back and forth still shuttled the mail-fleet of Commercial Airways. True, they had to modify the old slogan, "The mail must get through," to "The mail may get through, w.p."—weather permitting.

Then, mail or no mail, came the paralyzing in-between season. Thawing lakes and rivers became unsafe for either skis or pontoons and the enforced halt to aviation bestowed well-earned holidays on all the "knights of the north" and their faithful mechanics.

To Wop May now, as to Punch Dickins the year before, came word that marked a high-water point in his life.

On May 1st, those thousands who, years before, had followed his war record and had watched his death-defying feats of ten years back, and the generation that had since grown up with tales of his new achievements ringing in their ears, all exulted when they read this banner headline: "Wop May Wins McKee Trophy for Year 1929."

To honour him and Punch Dickins, second and third winners

of the coveted Canadian trophy, Edmonton's citizens decided on something more tangible than mere words. So on May 12th a joyful celebration was arranged, and the city's world-champion basketball team, the Commercial Grads, were rung in on the felicitations.

After a civic testimonial banquet in the Macdonald hotel, thirty thousand rejoicing spectators lined the streets. They cheered themselves hoarse as a parade formed and moved past the solid wall of humanity, a parade featuring the victorious "hoopsters," their celebrated coach, J. Percy Page, and the two special idols of the air, Punch and Wop.

On the steps of the parliament buildings, a programme of congratulatory speech-making was arranged under the chairmanship of John Michaels. The speakers included the premier of the Province, Hon. J. E. Brownlee, and the mayor of the city, J. M. Douglas, while a telegram from Hon. Charles Stewart, minister of the interior, reminded every one that the airmen were "doing a wonderful work for the northern territories."

Listening to the speeches that reviewed some of the accomplishments of the two air companies, Commercial Airways and Western Canada, operating out of their home town, that night many new disciples caught something of the faith that kept the men airborne even against the most overwhelming odds.

Already, they were told, these two organizations had piled up, in the northland, a total of 126,000 miles traversed in the Mackenzie area. Already, in a matter only of months, they had carried 780 passengers.

Further, the total air-mail poundage transported by Commercial Airways exceeded that of any other mail line in the world. While this route, they were reminded, was something which geography had given them, it was also something of which they could be exceedingly proud. For this route which Wop and his partners had organized was the longest, best known and most northerly air schedule in the world.

Then came the highlight of the evening. On behalf of all citizens, Hon. Dr. W. G. Egbert, the lieutenant-governor of Alberta, presented tokens of civic pride to the flyers. The gifts were fitting symbols to men striving to work by a strict time schedule, an engraved watch to Punch and an inscribed clock to Wop.

Modestly the airmen listened to the speeches, harkened to the

records, accepted the gifts, and then quietly got on with the pressing business ahead. For both their motto was still that expressed earlier by Punch, "Let's get on with the job."

Heartened by the great show of congratulations that sped him on his way, Wop returned to the supervising at McMurray of all the hundred and one details that would ensure for his mail route another successful season. Already, there, a fresh three tons had accumulated, awaiting the end of the spring break-up.

Soon the great red Bellancas and the huge blue and yellow Fokkers were humming along the sky lanes northward. Idris Glyn-Roberts in a friendly race with Punch Dickins dropped the Pace-maker Bellanca down first at Aklavik with a load of mail.

To pilot Walter Gilbert, who was assisting Punch on the Mackenzie run, there presently came word of a novel assignment that would add a bright feather to the cap of Western Canada Airways.

This young man had lived for a number of years the rugged life of a wilderness pilot in areas from Manitoba to the Pacific ocean and north to the Alaska mountains. As he zoomed over vast and almost unknown regions of northern Canada, he had formed the useful habit of paying particular heed to the topography of the land below him and of recording what he saw in a series of unofficial maps.

By such flights as that on which Leigh Brintnell ferried Mr. Finnie, the director of the Northwest Territories, over the mountains from Aklavik to Dawson, key personalities in the federal government were being demonstrated the possibilities of the aeroplane. So at this point there was assigned to Western Canada Airways and to pilot Gilbert what was to prove an historic official task.

Eighty-five years before, Sir John Franklin and his party of one hundred and five men had vanished in northern Canada. In two ships, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, they had tried to force their way through a northwest passage to the Pacific. Somewhere, in the ice-locked region near King William Land, they had disappeared. While a cairn with some information of the fate of the expedition had been located on a point of that island, Sir John's grave and further possible records had never been discovered.

If an exploring party could visit the area during the brief late-summer weeks when no snow hid traces left by the luckless men, chances of definite discoveries to unravel the mystery of their fate

would be much more likely. So it had been proposed to arrange for an expedition under the charge of the veteran geographer-explorer, Major "Lockie" Burwash.

"Why don't you let us fly Major Burwash in?" Brintnell suggested to Mr. Finnie on that Aklavik-Dawson flight. An aerial tour, he pointed out, could compress into weeks what might otherwise require two to three years of the time of a valuable civil servant.

Now came word that an airborne expedition had been approved, and to Major Burwash and pilot Gilbert fell the honour of attempting this first aerial reconnaissance. With them would go Stan Knight, an air engineer who had also been a professional photographer—for their mission also was to include the important job of photographing as much as possible of this remote Arctic region and of recording information about the Magnetic Pole area on Boothia peninsula.

Busily pilot Gilbert canvassed Edmonton shops collecting needed equipment. He had just returned from a quick trip to Herschel Island lying northwest of the Mackenzie delta in the Arctic Ocean. Punch Dickins had made a flying first there the previous summer and now Gilbert, with six passengers, had paid the island its first commercial flight-visit.

"How do you like," shivered a local questioner, "this job of hopping about the shores of the Arctic Ocean?"

Herschel's Harbour, where he had put down, had a sufficient body of open water to accommodate the pontoons of his ship. But even now at the first of July, he had found, most of the continental coastline was still ice-bound.

"The Arctic in the most frigid weather," added the slight restless pilot, smiling wryly, "is preferable to fog-smothered mountains and the steep British Columbia coastline."

From remote Herschel, which had a white population of five—four mounties and a Hudson's Bay post manager—he brought a sample collection of bright Arctic flowers, buttercups, foxgloves and tiny forget-me-nots, salt grass and salal.

While Gilbert was shopping for his next Arctic sojourn, around the city and its environs there was a stir in the air not usually to be noted during the summertime holiday period. Postal service to the north was speeded up by having the planes pick up the mail right at the Edmonton seaplane base of Cooking Lake.

So, in this same week, Glyn-Roberts was putting down there with mail and passengers, while the general manager of the company,

Cy Becker, was thrusting skyward with Fort Resolution as his goal. Punch Dickins was northbound from McMurray with freight and passengers, and Con Farrell was winging off to Regina with the prairie air-mail.

Not only was the local atmosphere electric with excitement. That first flight of Brintnell's, in August of 1929, carrying the venturesome Gilbert Labine into Great Bear Lake, had by now touched off a continent-wide flare of fever. Early this year Punch had flown Labine, together with E. C. St. Paul, back to Great Bear.

"We were searching for copper at first," Punch afterward recalled, and this year of 1930 became known as the year of the "copper rush." Labine led the great rush with his staking of copper claims at Hunter Bay, on the east shore of the immense inland sea.

Then Labine, confirmed in a shrewd guess by observations made by Brintnell on that first flight, presently found the rare ore he was seeking. Samples sent to Ottawa verified his guess.

Soon the almost unknown words, "radium" and "uranium," were on every tongue. Many envious eyes were again casting a long look northward, a fresh stampede in that direction was getting under way, and in Edmonton names of focal points along Great Bear's shore, Echo Bay, Cameron Bay, Hunter Bay and Eldorado were quickly becoming household words.

How, by midsummer of 1930, this stampede had swollen, the northern air-harbour city tried to gauge from a report brought back by pilot Dickins.

"The air trails in the north are becoming crowded," said the man who had been accustomed to sharing the immense land of silences only with his mechanic and his plane. "There are more machines there this year than ever before."

On his last trip down, he said, he counted "seven machines at Fitzgerald, two at Rae, six at Hunter Bay, two at Coppermine. And as we flew from Coppermine to Hunter Bay we passed two more machines in the air."

Right at home in Edmonton, adventuring minds, fired by all this indirect contact with far-off horizons, envisioned something fresh and untried circling their own immediate sky vault. Joining hands, the members of the Chamber of Commerce and of the Aero Club began to investigate the possibility of forming a link with a noteworthy American enterprise.



Down in the United States, Edsel Ford had, several seasons previously, conceived the grand aerial scheme that had come to be known as the Ford Reliability Tours. A fleet of several makes of flying machines engaged annually in a cross-continent competitive voyage, and handsome prizes were awarded for the best records achieved.

Edmonton, it was felt, with its brand-new hangar, its class A municipal field, its strategic reaching out into the stupendous regions of the north and to the very shores of the Arctic, was ready for big things. It was ready for a grand air show.

"Why don't we," a daring citizen suggested, "invite the Ford Reliability Tour to come to Edmonton? And with it, of course, a number of other top-notch North American flyers?"

Readily the idea was approved, the guests were invited and quickly returned word that they were coming.

While some continued to dream of the wealth they might accumulate if only they too could skim through the air to the shores of Great Bear Lake or to the Coppermine, around the Blatchford Field there began a hum of hurrying activity.

Within the hangar a crew of men proceeded to lay a fine solid floor of concrete. Without, other crews busied themselves cutting grass, erecting rest rooms and first-aid tents, and getting everything shipshape for a crowd that was expected to double the numbers that had attended that great Victory Fair of 1919.

Supervising the overall operation of the field, Harbour-master Bell worked away to maintain a smooth-running schedule for all the regular flights, for the stop-overs of northbound visitors and for the daily teaching runs at which Captain Burbidge laboured tirelessly.

Capability in night and blind flying was going to be demanded particularly of the mail pilots on the prairie run, for soon that service was to be speeded by night flights in what Premier Bracken of Manitoba neatly termed a progressive "annihilation of time and space."

Thus, with pilot Gilbert's party already advancing toward the ice-choked shore of King William Land and a first large-scale air show arriving to split the home skies, September promised a double bill of aerial drama fare.

The tragedy of the Franklin party's total disappearance was a haunting mystery to tease men's minds everywhere. Which meant that this first aerial search for a solution to it justifiably rated top-priority headlines in the nation's newspapers.

By mid-August, Gilbert, Burwash and Air Engineer Stan Knight had reached Fort Hearne at the mouth of the Coppermine. There they awaited the valiant Hudson's Bay Company supply vessel, the *Baychimo*, which journeyed annually by way of Alaska to the western Arctic posts and which was bringing them essential fuel.

During the wait, accompanied by pilot "Buck" Buchanan, and Mechanic Knight, Gilbert set out to visit the site of another stranded "explorer" party. At their camp at the mouth of the Dease River, the MacAlpine expedition had of necessity abandoned the Western Canada Fokker SK.

Now, nearly a year later, Gilbert and Buchanan located the lonely "bird", still moored on the desolate coast. They filled her up with gas and oil and Buchanan flew her back, not too much the worse for her long anchorage on the shore of the Arctic ocean.

Presently the *Baychimo* arrived through the ice floes with the precious fuel, Explorer Burwash and Mechanic Stan Knight clambered aboard with Gilbert, and the Fokker monoplane was on its way.

Straightway they ran into engine trouble, and radio trouble. The radio, from which, if circumstances permitted, Gilbert was to broadcast each day at noon, they could do without. The engine, they could not. Even a balky engine was decidedly too great a risk.

Luckily, a hurried wire from the *Baychimo* was relayed to Western Canada Airways head office at Winnipeg. It brought, racing through the Arctic sky, a doubtful answer to their hasty request for help.

Buchanan was bringing back to them that lonely vigilant of the Arctic, the Fokker SK.

They exchanged planes and, without benefit of radio communication, set forth off into the silent spaces where the ill-starred Franklin party had vanished.

Now the public began to sit up alert, for only piquant scraps of the prelude to the main act could be furnished to them. For days, the exact whereabouts of the plane and its occupants was unknown, and some Canadian newspapers even listed the whole party as missing. Conjecture saw them suffering the same fate as Franklin's men. As a result, anticipation awaiting the playing out

of the great air drama quickly built up to tremendous proportions.

Finally, for all to follow, the lines of the play began to be revealed. Edmonton eyes read in a local newspaper the giant eight-column banner headline: "Gilbert Flies to Magnetic Pole; Finds Franklin Camps."

"Major Burwash and Edmonton pilot back at Coppermine with records of ill-fated Arctic expedition," continued the subhead.

Scene by scene, the drama unfolded.

Only eighty miles east of Coppermine, at Bernard Harbour, the party had been stormbound for a whole week. Then, splitting the Arctic silences, the great Fokker put down at Cambridge Bay, where last year's SK passengers had at last found refuge. There, too, fuel at this Hudson's Bay post had been brought for them by the *Baychimo*.

Next, with Stan Knight continuously operating the camera, from this harbourage on vast Victoria Land they crossed the Queen Maud Sea to King William Land.

Along these lonely coastal areas, eloquently described Gilbert, "the dull brown of the hills stands out, snow-flecked here and there, in intense contrast to the deep blue of the sea and the aquamarine of the lakes of every size and shape in the more distant background."

This great and little known area of Canada possessed, he noted, "a dull frozen picturesqueness giving the impression of an unfinished masterpiece of creation."

Their first point of call on King William Land was the snugly-situated Peterson Bay or Gjoa Haven, the only inhabited spot on this barren wasteland. There a further life-saving fuel cache awaited them.

Proceeding early next day and taking with them Richard Finnie, a son of the director of the Territories, they ventured northeastward over the island and across James Ross Strait to ice-edged Boothia Peninsula.

Here, the site of the North Magnetic Pole, Major Burwash completed a series of observations supplemented by the aerial photographing by Stan Knight. Then Gilbert hurriedly steered his ship back to King William Land. All along these rock-rimmed shores were jammed great ice floes which would make a safe landing on the sea absolutely out of the question.

"A forced landing over the pack ice," Major Burwash calmly

commented afterward to reporter Don MacDougall, "would have meant certain death. Thanks to pilot Gilbert and his mechanic, Stan Knight, the motor didn't stop."

So they reconnoitred a small fresh-water lake near the northwest shore of the island and close by Victory Point, a spot discovered by the 1851 expedition of Captain McClintock as a camp-site of Franklin's party. Estimating the depth of the lake to be adequate for SK's pontoons, cautiously Gilbert set her down in the water.

From this lake-shore they hurried on foot to visit the campsite. Here they took a set of graphic pictures.

Vivid photographs of the rock cairn that McClintock had found, and particularly a revealing reproduction, taken at Victory Point, of a jumbled pile of cordage and canvas, pointed the tragic climax for Franklin's party. These telling photographs were published now in the newspapers, so that readers could all share something of this greatest of all Arctic disasters.

Already a skim of ice was forming on the little lake. Chilled by the bitter winds and the obvious fate that the formidable Arctic prepares for humans, the group sought out another lake some fifty miles south at Terror Bay. This had been another site of the shipwrecked Franklin crews. Here they examined and photographed more weatherworn relics.

Their hopes of finding the actual grave of the renowned leader and perhaps some final clues of the fate of his men were dashed by the myriads of strewn rocks edging the shores. Piled and repiled through eighty-five years of storms and ice-jams, this elemental stew-pot of stones forbade the chance of ever locating one tiny grave.

Apparently, only the pitiful shreds of evidence which remained, pieces of canvas, cordage and cloth, and from which they collected samples for headquarters at Ottawa, alone must provide the parts for patching together the completed story of the expedition.

Safe back once more at Gjoa Haven, the airborne geographers raced a threatening storm west to Coppermine.

Soon they were again in Alberta's capital, after a five-thousand-mile flight that had turned the clock back eighty-five years and brought intimately close "the north's greatest mystery and its greatest tragedy."

Instantly, and quite naturally, the modest little party of flying adventurers became the heroes of the hour.

In the midst of the embarrassment of being hailed as practically "home-town boys," the sturdy Major Burwash sagely suggested a sequel that Sir John Franklin would have applauded.

"Some day," he predicted, "the lands of the far north will be of great use for development as bases on the route to Europe."

Meantime his flight with Gilbert confirmed what had been previously deduced. With their ships caught fast by the mighty octopus of ice, Franklin's men had finally abandoned them and sought to escape southward by land. From this futile venture, they had turned back in a desperate attempt to regain their imprisoned ships.

Most successful feature of this first flight into this region of disaster was the photographing of two thousand miles of little known coast areas and harbours and the reaching by air of the Magnetic Pole zone. In addition, much new information could now be appended to maps and charts already in existence.

Soon Major Burwash was on the wing again, piloted by W. J. McDonough, *en route* from Edmonton to Ottawa to complete the last lap of the longest air journey to date in Canadian history. It was indeed a moment of triumph for Western Canada Airways and for aviation.

There was barely a moment now to catch the breath before the next many-scened drama was on stage,—“To be the greatest air show ever put on in any western city,” forecast the busy promoters.

Anticipation for the day, Wednesday, September 17, 1930, mounted by the minute. The newspapers published pictures and biographies of the most celebrated flyers arriving to take part. They printed informative diagrams illustrating samples of aerial manoeuvres, turns and loops and stalls, the Barrel Roll, the Falling Leaf.

In conjunction with its advertising merchants, the *Journal* even conducted a novel contest in which bits of an aeroplane must be discovered and correctly pieced together.

“Whatever is the world coming to?” sighed the pioneers. In those twenty-one years since that “mad” Reginald Hunt had made an aeroplane fly over the town’s west end, obviously aviation had come of age.

Altogether sixty planes, including thirty-five with the Ford Reliability Tour, were promised for action on the great day. Ace of all the noted flyers to be present was Captain Frank Hawks, who

flew the fastest machine in all the world and who was everywhere heralded as the speed mystery of the age.

To comparative "old-timers" who had gasped at the antics of the *City of Edmonton* more than ten years before, came a heart-warming and nostalgic note.

A wartime trainee whose flying career had been cut short by the armistice, Edward Reynolds of Wetaskiwin, now owned the venerable machine. A farmer with a great flair for mechanics, Reynolds had scraped together sufficient funds to acquire the Jenny and to restore her to flying shape.

Now someone wanted to know if he were bringing the old girl up for the air show. "She's still flyable", assured Reynolds.

"How long will an aeroplane last?" his questioner persisted.

"Plenty long," retorted the Wetaskiwin aviator.

In fact, he'd like to fly her back to the city to take part in the show. But, he explained, she's "in need of re-covering." Otherwise he would be glad to bring her, if only to have her serve as an example of how much progress has been made in aeroplane building since she started to roar, as a training plane, fourteen years before.

Finally, all but the weather was assured to be in readiness for the day. As ever on the Arctic rim, it was unpredictable.

"All the gadgets used to forecast our erratic weather," someone facetiously reported, "indicate a promising day."

Sure enough, the day dawned fair enough, as promised, and the afternoon cloud-banks that hovered threateningly about waited until evening before deluging down upon the airfield.

All morning the atmosphere was shattered with preliminary sounds.

Presently from out of the east came the prologue to the pageant. Swinging in from the water-base at Cooking Lake, soared the city's particular pride, the three red Bellancas and the Lockheed Vega that comprised the fleet of Commercial Airways. Like a colourful chorus, they moved showily through their paces.

Then Captain "Moss" Burbidge, in a club Moth, added an air ballet. At no time was the small yellow bird more than two hundred feet above the ground. Under the control of the expert instructor, it performed a swift succession of dizzy gyrations. Like a ballet girl it waltzed and dipped and circled.

"No marsh hawk," dazedly noted a reporter, "ever had himself under such perfect control."

There was more to come.



A few minutes earlier, a spectator at the airfield was speaking to "Moss" about a featured stunt flyer in Britain who had won prolonged applause by diving and then spinning his wheels on the ground before shooting upward.

"Jolly simple," commented the genial instructor, who had guided many machines in many far lands.

So, before completing his morning's daily dozen, he now dove sharply toward the field.

"He'll smash! He's gone!" a hundred spectators screamed as the little Moth plunged earthward.

It seemed impossible that he could nose her up again before she was reduced to matchwood. He did it. Suddenly he turned her nose up.

Without the slightest jar, he spun the wheels on the ground. Gaily then he leaped skyward and wafted off on another joyful waltz above the Blatchford Field.

Promptly at 1:30 in the afternoon the show proper opened on an even more dizzying note. Cleaving the upper air into myriads of swirling patterns, Canada's famed stunt and thrill expert, Captain J. D. Parkinson, test pilot of the Curtiss Reid aircraft company at Montreal, put his light machine through a fantastic series of acts.

For a crowd of spectators estimated to number 35,000, in great form he roared through spins and loops and rolls all in breath-taking succession. His special stunt was a "bunting" manoeuvre that involved a first half of a loop that he contrived to finish backside up. Time after time he ripped upside down over the palpitating mass of watchers beneath him.

"The most deft bird that ever spread its wings," commented an onlooker, "could never equal half the things that Captain Parkinson did with that tiny machine that looked as fragile as a child's kite."

Then Captain Campbell Shaw, test pilot for the Fairchild Aircraft company, and Captain Holley of Fleet Aircraft, joined the soloist on the sky stage. There followed another breath-stopping series of stunts and evolutions.

Skyward more and more aeroplanes climbed to show their capabilities, while on the ground a squad of two hundred policemen maintained orderliness and kept out of harm's way the huge throng of head-tilting spectators. Among the day's innovations was a

Lockheed Vega piloted by Captain W. S. Brock and equipped with a radio-installation that carried on a sky-earth conversation with radio station CJCA.

Finally, during a moment's lull, a loudspeaker announced that North America's speed king, Captain Frank Hawks, was nearing the city.

There were no long, long hours of scanning the sky as they had scanned it for Katherine Stinson. There were not even long, long minutes. Almost at once a tiny speck like a fly appeared in the eastern sky.

Quickly it mushroomed into a red bullet, a tearing screaming bullet that ripped through the atmosphere above them at three hundred miles an hour. When, finally, it condescended to be earth-borne on the display field, it held the spotlight of attention for the touring bedazzled crowds.

Too soon the kaleidoscopic programme of thrills was over and officials and guests of honour trooped to the Macdonald Hotel for a welcoming dinner. Honoured, too, as special guests were the actors of the previous drama, Major Burwash and Walter Gilbert, and, naturally, Wop May and Punch Dickins.

As accolades were heaped upon the participants in the air show, Mayor Douglas summed it all up for an Edmonton that, in spite of itself, was growing so sky-minded: "A great epoch in the life of the city."

For the hard-working local "boys" and the visitors, Captain Shaw had warm praise: "Finest show I've seen in any city in the past two years."

Especially did those in charge draw a thankful breath that all events had gone forward smoothly. Other than a longish bit of waiting at times between acts and a few over-eager small boys straying from their parents, no mishap marred the great day.

Of course, commented the celebrated Captain "Parky" Parkinson, "Aerobatics are not the least bit dangerous when performed by a careful pilot."

Next day, Captain Hawks, true to reputation, rocketed to Calgary for another display. Through those two hundred miles over which tiny Katherine Stinson had skimmed, from one rail station to the

next, consuming two long hours and five minutes during that conscientious tour of 1918, the speed "devil" meteored his way in just forty-five minutes flat.

Which was, quite definitely, another new record for Alberta.

Gradually the atmosphere over the Province's capital city, that had been so tortured and torn with the whirr of wings and the roar of motors, settled back into a quieter pattern. Yet never so quiet as it was wont to be.

For one thing, the air companies and their staffs were rushing to complete as many commitments as possible before the next in-between season.

There was, too, the prairie air-mail schedule to be rigidly maintained, and the north mail to be transported. And there was the sensational new chapter in mineral exploration building toward a whole book of fresh aerial achievement.

Which meant that Edmonton, already calling itself the "gateway to the north" could never again settle back too comfortably on the rustic rungs of its ever-wider-opening gate.

After a brief nap during the late-autumn in-between season, reports of "unprecedented activity" quickly roused the little city from its torpor.

As the planes piloted by Punch and Wop and their associates began winging off into the north, they found one innovation that was a happy augur for the future. At Fort Smith, the administrative centre for the Northwest Territories, they were able to soar down now to a new winter landing-field cleared of brush by the federal department of the interior.

Winging away from the Blatchford Field, the planes were being increasingly loaded with passengers and freight. Especially in the northland, the inhabitants had already grown amazingly air-minded, and new uses for air transport were constantly increasing.

Even barnstorming, once believed to be the life-blood of air traffic, was not altogether despised. On one week in November, for instance, seven barnstorming machines arrived from Calgary to do a brisk business in "penny a pound" flights. Around the city, upwards of a thousand persons took advantage of this sky bargain.

One day that same month, the new hangar set a record for itself as the centre of a busy air harbour. Fourteen ships were crowded

within its walls. In spite of herself, it now appeared, the city had established her air reputation.

"Canada has," wrote Ralph W. Cram, editor of the *Aero Digest*, "two national heroes, Wop and Punch, while the United States has one, Lindy. Edmonton," he announced, "is the outstanding aviation centre in Canada."

Locally, the Aero Club too was putting forth its best to make those old dreams come true.

The Edmonton Club, summed up the survey of aviation for the year 1930, "has established two dominion records. It has completed the most flying hours, 1700, and turned out the most licensed pilots."

Five men had qualified for commercial licenses and fifty-four for private pilot's licenses. Thus, at one hundred dollars apiece for each man trained, according to the agreement arranged in 1927-1928, it was now to receive \$5400 from the Dominion government as a bonus for its work.

No wonder the growing group of air-minded anticipated a new year patterned with accomplishment still more phenomenal. Even the most indifferent could not but now admit that this new-fangled medium of motion was focussing the spotlight more and more frequently upon their slow-growing farming centre.

From the box of skyborne surprises yet in store, more were to be pulled forth during the year about to break.

In this new year Edmonton was to attain a new air stature, the stature and poise that rubbed off from visitors girdling the globe, linking her with age-old centres of Europe and Asia.

## 1931

LIGHTING THE PATH of aerial progress, by mid-February of 1931 a great golden chain illumined the winter darkness of the Prairies. From Winnipeg westward to Regina, Calgary, Edmonton and Saskatoon, a string of beacons and floodlighted landing fields showed the way to the pilots flying to inaugurate a third step in the air-mail programme.

Night-flying of the mail had begun.

Already, on the second day of this month of February, a second step had been initiated. This was the completing of the air-mail link with a United States service. Blazing the way to tie the northern loop in with the international schedule, on the second Pilot Calder had whirled away from Edmonton with first mail to United States points. This mail was to reach its destination by way of a Winnipeg-St. Paul service.

On February the third, Pilot Andy Cruickshank completed this circuit by bringing to the city the first American air-mail.

Then, in mid-February, there came achievement of the third step, which meant fulfilment of a splendid dream, an around-the-clock and continent-wide air-mail service.

Into and out of Alberta's capital, pilots Con Farrell and Paul Calder ran the first flights of the newest schedule, which would lop six hours off the time it took the city's mail to reach Winnipeg.

"Night flying," said Paul, who had made that first mail test flight back in December of 1928, "is simple."

Lessened at night, he noted, was the thrill of watching the ground suddenly leap up to meet the aeroplane. At Saskatoon and Moose Jaw and Regina, he reported, the fields were well lighted and landing was easy.

On the other hand there were, he found, certain compensations to night flying. "The plains seem less barren at night as the lights of the villages come and go."

One regret Pilot Calder had. All winter, along his route over the white-cloaked prairies, farmers and their families appeared at the doors of their dwellings to wave godspeed to pilot and plane.

"Some of them haven't missed a day all winter," he told a passenger, Robinson McLean, as he whizzed along on this first new flight schedule. "They seem to believe that if they don't wave to me, I won't be able to get in on time."

Especially interested, he added, were the Indians on their reserves. On one occasion as he flew eastward over the rolling lands of Pound-maker's reserve in the Battle River country, he saw what first appeared to be a cluster of brilliant flowers. A nearer view told him the bright splotch was a group of Indians clad in gay cottons and waving furiously to him.

"The older Indians," he grinned, "seem terrified of the machine. The young ones were evidently more accustomed to the changes made by the white man. Bravely they stood their ground, waving violently. One young squaw, with a papoose slung behind, waved and then turned and ran, with the baby bouncing against her crimson-clad back."

This carrying of the mail might already have become so much routine to adults in the cities where Pilot Calder sailed down. But to the children he was the hero of the hour.

When they landed at North Battleford, McLean reported, the children flocked right up to the door of the machine. Quickly they surrounded him and, as he moved off to the buildings, "with vast admiration they trooped right after him."

At Battleford a threatening storm made a change of "bus" advisable. So he left behind the great Super-Universal and climbed into a standard Fokker with open cockpit. On the former, sleet and ice forming on the windshield of the closed cockpit would render the machine unsafe.

At all times, Paul said with considerable satisfaction, the great beacon lights that had been erected at federal government expense, "were clearly visible."

Winging into Edmonton, Pilot Farrell too was met by a curious crowd eager to know his first night-flying experiences.

"Any danger in night flying?" he was asked.

"No," he answered emphatically. "Not on that route." He had



come from Regina by way of Saskatoon and had been delayed an hour by fighting head-winds. Other than that, he found no difficulty.

"There was no moon and the horizon was hidden. But all the beacons were plainly visible and the route is clear all along."

For passengers becoming accustomed to this miracle of being wafted through the air, a visitor to the city, Thomas Wayling of Ottawa, voiced their very thoughts, "I feel much safer in the air. You must remember the fuss made when trains started to travel at fifteen miles an hour."

Not many, of course, could remember. And if they were a little miffed by the implication, they could have hugged him now as he added, "Edmonton is far ahead in aviation. Even Toronto has no municipal airport yet. You have more real pilots concentrated around Edmonton than in all the rest of Canada."

At these words, many a citizen, remembering how the taunt of rusticity was so often on Eastern lips, took new heart. What if the roar of the aeroplane engines were distressing to the cows and the buffalo and the caribou. Yes, and to the chickens. Recently a resident had gone to city council complaining that the noise of the engines was keeping his hens from laying.

True, sometimes there were accidents. And sometimes planes went missing for a period, stormbound in some isolated spot. Then, by mid-May of that year, Commercial Airways received a deathblow.

In eighteen months of operation as the world's farthest north and longest air-mail route, it had not suffered one casualty to personnel or passengers. Nor had it lost one single piece of mail, this in the face often of the most hazardous flying conditions.

Then came the blow. The company's principal backers, the two brokers I. W. C. Solloway and Harvey Mills, were in trouble with the law and the flying company was one of the assets that must fall under the auctioneer's hammer.

Some months previously Western Canada Airways had been expanded into a trans-Canada system to be known as Canadian Airways. Rumour soon reported that James Richardson's new air giant would presently absorb the stalwart Commercial Airways system.

Barely was there time to dry local eyes and wipe away the tears of regret for the gallant little company that had begun its history with the sturdy Avro Avian. For the eyes of the rest of the continent

were slanted north beyond Edmonton to the mineral finds at Great Bear lake, and the only thing to do was to join the tide and try to sweep forward with it to the promised bonanza.

Just how the very Arctic could be brought to the city's back door in a telescoping of vast distances was measured again, before the spring break-up, by restless Pilot Gilbert. After picking up three independent traders and a cargo of precious white fox furs from Stapylton Bay, on the Arctic coast one hundred miles northwest from Coppermine, he made a brief pause at the latter post.

Then, pursued all the way by stiff winds, he whizzed south to Edmonton. He had made the long hop of 1374 miles in ten hours, forty-five minutes flying time. This was a fresh record to make the prairie pioneers blink.

Gilbert, who was presently to be honoured with membership in the Royal Geographic society for his share in the Burwash expeditions, had established, with the people of Edmonton, a solid reputation for himself as an observer of nature. Again, trying to answer all their questions about his flight, he didn't disappoint them.

From the air, he said, there was a tremendous amount of game visible. "We could see everywhere caribou, moose, buffalo, and foxes, the oddest animal for us to see.

"Seldom," Geographer Gilbert added thoughtfully, "do you see foxes. But they were plentiful."

Presently this wiry captain of the wilds flew another record-breaker. What otherwise could have been an arduous journey of two months by dog-team, the long stretch from Aklavik to McMurray he now compressed into a travelling time of eleven hours fifty minutes.

Again, on one of the exploratory trips he loved, he ventured northward to Fort George and over the Sifton pass to the Upper Liard River country.

Soon he was back again, having chalked up a 1700-mile trip and swooped over a thousand miles of primeval land that never before had echoed to the throbbing of an aeroplane engine.

In such repeated instances were the local-district flyers continuing to pile up mileages out of the city that made a single girdling of the earth's circumference pale into insignificance. The actual pacing out of an aerial whirl right round the globe was, in the midsummer

of 1931, still an epic deed of human courage and endurance calculated to capture the attention and admiration of a whole world.

By late June, such a feat was in progress. Edmonton, used as it was to welcoming heroes of the skies, was bursting with excitement and anticipation. She was going to be a key hostess on a first globe-girdling flight of a single aeroplane.

So far, the record for such a solo accomplishment was held by the great airship, the Graf Zeppelin, that in 1929 under the command of Captain Hugo Eckener had floated round about the planet earth in just less than twenty-one days.

Now a daring pair of flyers, Wiley Post and Harold Gatty, were dreaming of circumnavigating the globe within an elapsed time of ten days. In their silver-winged Lockheed-Vega monoplane, the Winnie Mae, they planned to set a record that would make that first of the Graf Zeppelin's look like that of a cart-horse as compared with a Model T.

Touching off the blaze of excitement in Edmonton came, on a momentous day in spring, a letter to Harbour-master Jimmy Bell.

"If your airport facilities are satisfactory, I will likely be in Edmonton about June 1st. I plan to take off from Edmonton, proceeding to Alaska."

Next came enquiries as to hangar space, night lighting, refueling and mechanical services. The letter was signed by the noted Oklahoma pilot, Wiley Post.

Happily Captain Jimmy was able to answer all the questions in the affirmative. Presently came reports that Captain Post was planning to take off eastward from Roosevelt field, New York.

"Is he coming to or going from Edmonton?" questioners besieged the busy airport manager.

"It now appears," Captain Jimmy answered reasonably, "that he is going the other way round."

Go the other way the venturing pair did. They took off from Roosevelt field on June 23, and hopped to Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, for a first refueling stop.

If the flyers' luck held all the way round, this notable change of flight plan, excited Edmontonians realized at once, was going to make all the difference of a world conquered to their little city.

Immediately, while the wires and the radios followed the progress

of these "two gentlemen in a hurry," around Blatchford field men scuttled about with all sorts of last-minute preparations. Word of their arrival to and departure from the city would be tapped out to a waiting world from the Canadian Pacific telegraph offices, to which linemen now strung connecting wires from the airport.

From New York came men and equipment of the NBC to set up, in co-operation with the local station CJCA, a radio hook-up that would enable millions of anxious listeners to learn of the *Winnie Mae's* arrival from Alaska.

Well ahead of schedule, the gleaming *Winnie Mae* skimmed over the Atlantic to Britain and on to Germany. Approximately 4000 miles after leaving New York, they were in Berlin, twenty-four hours after the takeoff from Harbour Grace.

From Moscow they flew to Novo Sibersk in the heart of Siberia and excitement mounted as word came that they might be in Edmonton within four more days. At the next stop, Irkutsk, all was still going well with them.

Then at Blagoveshchensk they sat down in a muddy morass that nearly ended then and there the great aerial epic. Teams of horses failed to drag the poor ship clear of the muck. At last a tractor, aided by the bodily might of fifty shoving soldiers, wrested her clear and she was airborne again. Fourteen precious hours had been lost.

At Khabarovsk, the last point of touchdown in eastern Siberia, motor trouble still further delayed the hustling pair. Then they were off, bound for Nome and Edmonton and the last chunk of their circumference-riding.

Hurrying to check their maps, the folks awaiting them in Edmonton discovered the bleak prospect facing the round-the-world voyagers.

That 2100-mile loop from Khabarovsk to Nome meant the crossing of a forbidding region of high mountains and stormy seas. It meant the aerial leaping over the strait of Tartary, the sea of Okhotsk, the Kamchatka peninsula and the Bering sea. Could they possibly make such a dread voyage?

Surprising all the head-shakers, came presently the glad news from Nome. Out of the mist and fog that hung low over that city roared the brave ship. At the Blatchford Field, eyes sparkled as the possibility of their arrival there became a definite probability.

The *Winnie Mae's* home continent, North America, had more troubles in store for her. Solomon Beach outside of Nome was in

such poor shape that she couldn't possibly take on enough fuel for the long hazard-loaded flight to Edmonton.

Next the Australian navigator, Harold Gatty, got his arm injured and narrowly missed death from the whirring prop blades and the *Winnie Mae* sulked over on her nose as they attempted to take off from the wet beach. With a hammer, Wiley Post straightened out the bent propeller blade and off they got at last for Fairbanks, 529 miles inland, to pick up their fuel supply there.

By way of encouragement Jimmy Bell had wired Nome, telling them all was in readiness. To help them down, additional flares on the Blatchford Field were set out in the shape of the letter L to indicate to them the direction of the wind.

At last arrived word from Fairbanks. The *Winnie Mae* was *en route* to Edmonton. A first flight of a single aeroplane right round the globe was to touch earth within the confines of the small unknown city.

Anxiously everyone waited. Excitement mounted as high as the towering peaks over which the flyers were going to cross. It had become apparent that Canada's weather was going to treat them as badly as had Blagoveshchensk in Siberia. All day a torrential rain poured down and Blatchford Field lay drenched in a muddy ooze.

"What do you think? Can they make it?" worried questioners asked Wop May.

Surely Wop, who had endured the ultimate in that January trip to Fort Vermilion, would be able to hazard a shrewd guess. Glumly they hung on every word of his answer.

The area over which the men were crossing was, he said, from an aviation standpoint "the worst in the world." But, he added more cheerfully, "I don't think the rain will lessen their chances, once they get past the mountains."

Presently the crowd's patient watching was rewarded with good news. From comparatively near home, Fairview in the Peace River country, was flashed the word. The *Winnie Mae* had passed overhead. As the crow might fly, she was only 360 miles distant from the city.

Next from Falher came the same glad message, and then from High Prairie. The ship, for news of which the world waited, had been seen overhead.

Still more rain pelted from the sodden sky. There was the roar of a machine and the crowd was ready to stampede forward.

Then they discovered their mistake. It was one of the local heroes, Andy Cruickshank, coming down with the prairie mail.

Questioners besieged the hardy pilot, who knew from previous experience a good deal about flying in the mountainous regions of the Yukon and Alaska, and from present experience how to find the Blatchford Field in the driving rain.

"They're going to have a mighty hard time finding Edmonton," he admitted. "If they drop below the cloud fifty miles out," was the comforting added note of this veteran of the western skies, "and pick up a railroad line, they can make through all right."

At last 2500 pairs of straining eyes, clustered round the Blatchford Field, were gladdened by the sight of a lifetime.

Out of the weeping sky grew the gleaming white shape. No doubt this time. It was the sturdy world traveller, the *Winnie Mae*.

Gracefully, with the aid of landing lights that beamed blurred rays through the late-afternoon murk, and with no apparent sign of weariness from her long ordeal, she touched down on the sopping field. She taxied through the muck and came to a stop half way down the runway.

Slipping, slithering, falling, the crowd pitched forward. Police lines were obliterated as they smashed toward the plane. Out stumbled a dazed, deafened pair of human beings, to be surrounded by their ecstatic welcomers.

Briefly now the eyes and the ears of the world strained toward Edmonton, an outpost of civilization burning in the sudden blaze of fame.

Through the miracle of radio, waiting millions over the continent heard the glad sounds, the roar of the *Winnie Mae's* Wasp motor, the cheering, the horn tooting, the speeches of welcome, the tired voices of the haggard heroes, even the sloshing of hundreds of feet in the miry field.

The rain went unheeded as the crowd still pressed forward, to try to touch the hands of these super-men who had performed this wonder of the skies, to lay a finger on the marvellous ship that had crossed legendary lands they would never see, the ship that had telescoped time and annihilated space.



"It's downhill all the way now," smiled Gatty, the wizard Australian navigator whose guiding of the *Winnie* straight as the crow flies those difficult 1450 miles from Fairbanks was at once acclaimed "a minor miracle."

"It's duck-soup from now on," he breathed happily.

Wiley Post, who had endured the strain of watching his way round the world with the vision of only one eye, and whose long stint at the controls had obviously exhausted him almost beyond the point of human endurance, began to worry at once about the takeoff problem.

If the *Winnie Mae* were loaded with the 540 gallons of gas she needed for the long hop to New York, she could not possibly lift her wings from the sodden Blatchford Field.

"Is there some nearby city," Wiley wanted to know, "that has a field in better shape?"

"We'll show you," officials promised. "As soon as we can get away."

Still the hero-worshipping crowd clamoured outside the hangar for a longer and better look at the pair who had lived alone with the sun and the stars, and too often the clouds and the rain.

"We were flying sometimes," the worn Oklahoman muttered, "with the weather so thick I could see only the glass on the cockpit windows."

Weakly, they protested against a further demonstration of themselves.

"We're tired and we're dirty," objected Harold Gatty. "In fact," he added with a modest grin, "we're not much to look at anyway."

Out they went to wave and speak again and to hear the heartening cheers and the ruckus of blaring horns. Then they were whisked out of the muddy ooze on to a broad avenue of solid pavement.

"How about this for a takeoff?" Wiley was asked.

The car was racing down that prize real-estate fiasco, Portage Avenue, with the two-mile length of sturdy concrete that long before had captured the fancy of Captain Tailyour and Jock McNeill.

"Splendid," agreed the much-relieved aviator.

In fact, he remarked presently, "It's the best takeoff I've seen in the whole course of the flight.

"Roosevelt Field," he recollected aloud, "was in poor shape. Berlin

had no runways. There was only one field in the whole trip, at Khabarovsk, in good condition.

"The Russians were wonderful," he added. "They did everything possible under the sun for us."

The "two gentlemen in a hurry" held a quick conference with Captain Bell and Weather Expert S. A. Yorke.

In view of the ugly weather, the sizeable chore of extricating the *Winnie Mae* from the mud of the Blatchford Field, transporting her over to Portage and servicing and refueling her, should they snatch a few hours' badly needed rest?

Definitely they were going to show up the great Graf Zeppelin as a poky old cart-horse. So far they had used up considerably less than half the time she had taken to girdle the globe. They decided for sleep.

Dozing as he rode to the hotel, Wiley Post again fell asleep even before a light meal was served in their room.

While they rested, Captain Bell, Engineer Haddow, Aero club members and work crews laboured like Trojans into the night.

Like their famous guests, most of the spectators, too, turned in at their homes for a short sleep, to return hurriedly in the pre-dawn twilight.

By now the *Winnie Mae* had been trundled down the length of Portage to the end farthest from the airport, loaded up with gas and oil and carefully prepared.

Refreshed by a six-hour sleep, their first and only overnight stop in the whole jaunt, the pilot and the navigator returned.

Three thousand early-rising spectators had left their beds, joining those who had spent the night at the airport, and were already on hand to bid them Godspeed. Cheering and shoving, they pushed forward toward the plane as the pair climbed aboard. Takeoff had to be delayed until police and loudspeakers drove the surging over-eager crowd back out of harm's way.

Then the *Winnie Mae* tore northwestward for a mile down Portage Avenue. Without difficulty she lifted into the sky and banked sharply to the right. Circling away over the North Saskatchewan river, she disappeared into the breaking light of dawn. It was twenty minutes to four in the morning of July the first.

Fourteen hours later, nonstop, she reached Roosevelt Field and

immortality. There a riotous homecoming awaited a deserving pair of heroes and a great ship. They three had tied that new girdle round about the globe within nine days' span.

Back in Edmonton they hadn't overlooked their thank-you's. Proudly Captain Jimmy Bell displayed a two-line note:

To Captain Bell with much appreciation for all your help.  
(Signed) Wiley Post.

"City Engineer Haddow," protested Captain Jimmy, "deserves to get the praise. He spent long hours of heavy work getting the aeroplane out on Portage, using his men and tractors to accomplish a task that would otherwise have been impossible."

It had been a great day and a great dawn for Edmonton. Here was a harbour welcoming round-the-globe voyagers. Here was a new kind of Plymouth hailing stout world-conquerors back from circumnavigating the globe.

Things were barely put to rights again round about the Blatchford Field when, next day, more continent-crossing visitors swung down, also in the rain.

This time the guest was a Texas giant, a monster tri-motor Ford refueling plane. At the controls was another pilot of indomitable courage, Jimmy Mattern, who had his sights set, too, on round-the-world record-breaking.

Now, however, with his co-pilot Nick Greener of Fort Worth, Texas, he was involved in a most novel and daring plan, a plan that might herald a new kind of aviation accomplishment.

Waiting at Seattle was another venturesome Texan, Colonel Reg Robbins. Spurred by a \$25,000 prize offered by a Japanese newspaper, Colonel Robbins was going to attempt to fly nonstop from Seattle to Tokyo. His flight was to be made possible by refuelling from the air from Jimmy Mattern's plane.

From Edmonton, then, the Ford refueler was to fly first to Fairbanks.

Carefully Mattern and Greener conferred with three local men who knew a good deal about northland flying, Andy Cruickshank, Paul Calder and Cy Becker.

Together they charted a route and marked maps pointing the

best path to follow. Particularly of help was the experience of Cruickshank, who had flown his "Spirit of the Yukon" for several years in that little-known land.

Again in the half light of a waking dawn, a ship waited on Portage for takeoff.

"If you crack up," cheerfully encouraged Pilot Cruickshank, "stay by your ship and we'll come after you."

Jimmy Mattern, whose courage recalled to onlookers the remarkable Captain Hoyt, retorted with a spirited sally.

"If we have to make a forced landing," he grinned, "I'll just look for the two biggest pine trees in the country while Nick gets the supplies ready to push out the door. Then I'll wipe the wings off between the trees and wait for help."

Soon the three powerful motors were roaring, and the mighty ship, loaded with 800 gallons of gasoline, bowled off down Portage Avenue.

Easily she lifted her great weight into the sky. She circled north-westward, bound for faraway Fairbanks and the misty seas beyond. If she succeeded in her refueling over Alaska, she was to accompany Colonel Robbins for another refueling half-way to Tokyo.

Trying to follow the course of this novel attempt was only one of the feats to claim attention during this 1931 summer of ever-building aerial achievement. Around the airfield preparations were being rushed for a second giant air show.

And down from the north came Punch Dickins with a chunk of history-making freight. With his three Arctic passengers in the Fokker Super-Universal, and the rest of his load, was a first shipment of three hundred pounds of radium-bearing ore. Gilbert Labine had discovered a jackpot which was soon to make the price of world-precious radium plummet down and was to send hundreds scurrying north seeking to share in the new-found mineral wealth.

While the great depression was bringing increasingly slack times to the rest of the continent, around Edmonton that one bright northern star beamed in the aerial firmament, beaming more men, more planes, more supplies, toward Great Bear Lake and the great radium rush.

Presently watching eyes were diverted toward Alaska and the on-to-Tokyo flight. Both planes—Colonel Robbins flying from

Seattle and Jimmy Mattern from Edmonton—had made their rendezvous there. But engine difficulties and wild weather prevented the aerial refueling and both planes turned back to Seattle.

They were not yet beaten, they announced.

Attention was next dramatically focused on achievements in Canadian aviation. On July 28, the first Trans-Canada Air Pageant was to arrive in the city.

With hard-working officials pressing to have everything in readiness, right on time the next day, a Wednesday, Mayor Douglas opened the show.

"Here the people are more air-minded," he bragged, "than any other city of like population in Canada."

"Every word true," thought many a spectator as the crowd swelled and the atmosphere was rent into a million shreds by the whirr of propellers driving planes through dazzling aerial antics.

With everything on time to the minute and something doing every minute, spectators craned aching necks to watch the dizzying succession of feats. Here, as across Canada, local Aero clubs were to participate in competitions, with visiting pilots acting as judges.

Leading off the show, the city club's five Moths displayed the accomplishments of locally trained talent. Headed by Captain Burbidge, the four pilots, Frank Brown, Art Rankin, Bert McCaw and Otto Thibert, gave a competent display of banking and turning, looping and diving, and, presently, mock bombing of a fake fort in the centre of the airfield.

Again a wizard master of control, Captain "Moss" generously pulled forth his whole bagful of clever tricks.

"Oh, oh," again and again the crowd gasped. The genial instructor was at his most expert as his machine sideslipped, spun about, turned over on its back, flipped into all sorts of awkward angles and each time came out of them with perfect precision.

"Everything but turning up its nose on the field," someone muttered weakly, ducking as "Moss" whizzed past.

Most of his flying he did a few feet from the ground and, as he skilfully sideslipped his machine, it seemed momentarily to be flying broadside to the direction in which it was travelling.

"Splendid, splendid," the flying visitors congratulated the man under whose guidance the club never had a serious accident.

There were more and more displays to follow from the distinguished visitors. This was the largest Canadian aerial pageant, to date in the Dominion's history, ever to cross the prairies on a tour that would take them right to the Pacific shore. In it were huge freighters and passenger carriers and spirited air force fighters.

Especially did all eyes strain to get a good look at the tour leader, Captain T. M. "Pat" Reid. A pilot who had pioneered in the Hudson Bay area with Harold Farrington and who had been the first to circumnavigate the great bay by air, Captain Reid had the previous year added fresh laurels to a colourful career.

A celebrated Alaskan pilot, Carl Ben Eielson, with his mechanic Earl Borland, had disappeared in the Bering sea area when he had gone to the aid of a trading vessel, the *Nanuk*, caught fast in the ice off the Siberian Arctic coast. Leading the precarious search for Eielson, Captain Reid and his mechanic had been themselves "lost" off the Alaska coast. With the aid of bits of native wood and great ingenuity, they had mended their damaged plane and got out alive.

This then was the man who had helped to organize the Trans-Canada Pageant and upon whose machine all eyes were strained.

Then Captain J. H. Sanderson, who was in charge of a display of three Fleet machines, bedazzled spectators with an individual performance of stunting. So much of his flying was done upside down that spectators steeled themselves to be ready to rush out and catch him as he tumbled from his plane.

Adding his book of "crazy" flying, Captain Bernard Martin practically kissed the ground in a borrowed club Moth and almost shaved the heads of the gasping crowd as he skimmed over them. With the younger spectators, Pilot J. F. Warren made a special hit as he scattered, from a sleek red Puss Moth, a shower of tickets that entitled the finders to free rides in the sky.

Adding a comic touch to the pageant that also delighted the young ones was a little act of "transition."

Major Geoffrey O'Brien, chief test pilot for the De Havilland company, accompanied by Miss C. Hooker, dressed in ancient togs and drove up in an ancient jalopy. From it they stepped into his company's smart new Puss Moth. After a brief flight round the sky bowl, they emerged to greet the crowd dressed in the latest fashionable attire.



Forecasting a new trend in which the city was, years hence, to have a maternal interest of her very own, was a weird contraption that almost stole the show. This was the Pitcairn autogyro. The first of its kind in Canada, this "flying windmill" was piloted by Captain G. W. Dean.

"It can rise from and land on a postage-stamp," remarked a knowing spectator.

Sure enough, almost vertically, the whirling rotors lifted it smoothly up and up. More amazingly, up-sky they also kept it hovering in an almost stationary position. Then they dropped it smoothly back down on the postage-stamp of green.

Another claimant to special attention was a champion whose specialty also was getting down as directly as possible. George Bennett, who had already made 1016 jumps by parachute, added still another to this world record as he leapt from a Fleet biplane, dangled low before the crowd and also made a safe descent upon the grass.

For Wop May and Pete Derbyshire, this was a moment to remember. "Remember my first jump from the old *Edmonton*?" chuckled Pete.

Finally came the punch of the whole show. The pride of the Royal Canadian Air Force "cavalry of the clouds," three silver Siskins, vaulted into the air. A headline attraction wherever they appeared and reputed to be Canada's fastest fighters, the glistening single-seaters rose in perfect formation. At 230 miles an hour, they raced, preserving that perfect formation. They dived and they looped with split-second precision. Then Flight Lieutenant Riddell gave a sample of individual aerobatics that set spines a-tingling over and over again.

More than one young lady soon was sighing, as the smart-stepping air force and commercial pilots emerged from their machines, "I'd even loop the loop in a Siskin with him."

The great show was over. Twenty thousand spectators within the gates who had paid admission enjoyed the privilege of a ground inspection of the marvelous machines. Of them the most stupendous were a Saro Cloud—a British giant equipped to light on either land or water and piloted by the famous Romeo Vachon, a later McKee

trophy winner—and a monster tri-motored Ford monoplane, all of buoyant light-weight metal, and guided by Flight Lieutenant J. A. Boret.

Next day there was passenger carrying. Then, the following morning, the great cavalcade roared off eastward to North Battleford. Behind, it left joyful memories of a great show that went off without hitch or mishap and of congratulatory words that lingered long in the minds of the hard-working sponsors.

"A wonderful airport, wonderful people, wonderful city," the tour manager, Marshall Foss had said. "The people back east don't know what a great town you have here."

Soberly Edmonton's citizens knew they couldn't assess themselves at quite that high a rating. They agreed there was some truth in the quiet assertion of a reporter, "The Trans-Canada Air Pageant completed the job of making Edmonton air-minded."

Taking stock, her inhabitants agreed that the great show was a milestone. But pioneers know that a milestone is only a marker, a marker pointing the necessity of moving forward. As for their air-harbour, too well they knew its limitations. That new hangar was not nearly large enough. In dry weather the field was a dust-bin. In wet weather it was a morass.

On the positive side, in this stock-taking, was the proud record of Captain Burbidge and the Aero Club, a record which promised a further triumph during the year in progress.

On the darker side were the persistent rumours that the prairie mail circuit was shortly to fall a victim to the growing depression. Which meant that chiefly northward, and toward that Eldorado being established on Great Bear Lake, lay the city's hope for an airborne future.

In that point of the compass more than a dozen pilots were building the reputation of the aeroplane for getting things accomplished. A few statistics released now by Canadian Airways set Edmonton heads computing.

Since Punch Dickins had first soared away toward the sub-polar lands a little more than two years before, "he has flown," announced his employer company, "166,580 miles over north air lanes and he has spent 1685 hours in the air."

Joined in his second year in the north by Walter Gilbert, the pair "have chalked up a mileage of more than a quarter of a million.

They have carried 2518 passengers and freighted more than a quarter of a million pounds of express. In twenty-one emergency flights, they have traversed 5500 miles."

With them, citizens remembered, flew their equally indomitable mechanics, Lew Parmenter and Stan Knight, members of the essential groups of air engineers whose skill and fortitude kept the machines flying and who shared every discomfort and danger with the pilots.

Highlighting all the midsummer aerial achievements of the north was a flight in that region by the American lone eagle of the Atlantic, Charles Lindbergh. Bound this time on a holiday trip to Tokyo with his wife, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, as sole passenger, he set off north-westward from Baker Lake, high up on the west Hudson Bay coast.

With typical hardihood and disregard of danger, in his Lockheed Sirius he zipped straight across the Barren Lands to Aklavik. At the latter post, a surprise was awaiting the pair.

Here, at last, on the remote shore of the Arctic, they had probably dreamed that they would be spared the company of ever-present reporters. They had reckoned without the *Edmonton Journal*.

Pilot Walter Gilbert, with Lew Parmenter and *Journal* staff-reporter Gordon McCallum, had whisked all the way to the mouth of the Mackenzie to meet them.

Through the sunlit night of August 5, the little knot of Canadians waited. Many had shaken their heads in dismay when they heard of the route Lindbergh had apparently chosen. When the watchers were beginning to lose all hope of their safe arrival and to shape tentative plans for organizing a search, there came the sudden sound of an aeroplane engine. They rushed to take a look. Sure enough, in the murky light of the four o'clock Arctic morning grew the shape of a red seaplane.

This time there was no need for more such famous words as those the pilot asked the fisherboats, "Is this the right road to Ireland?" There was only one post in all the maze of delta flat-land and, aided by the Arctic night-light, Lindbergh had homed straight to it.

Racing down to the water, the white "delegation" was immediately joined by beaming parka-clad Eskimo men, women and children. With the aid of canoes, they helped the weary visitors ashore and Gilbert and Parmenter saw to the safe mooring of their ship.

Having introduced himself, Reporter McCallum delighted the pair by letting them know that the "story" could wait until they'd had

some sleep. After all, there was no wire service out of Aklavik to announce that they had made, in complete safety, the long jump across the top of the continent.

"He's a good navigator," admired Edmonton's own "snow eagle," Punch Dickins, the man who had first crossed the dreaded Barrens. "He doesn't make mistakes."

When the famous flyer and his wife skipped onward toward Alaska and Tokyo, Gilbert rushed McCallum and the photographs marking their stay in Canada's northernmost metropolis back to Edmonton.

Gilbert's flight, accomplished in eleven hours fifty-five minutes flying time, set a new record. Together with the pictures and the newspaper stories, it compelled the city's residents to acknowledge that the Arctic was now practically at their back door.

That same week more Tokyo-bound flyers stopped off right in the city.

First returned the monster refueler piloted by Jimmy Mattern and Nick Greener. Again, as when Wiley Post and Harold Gatty arrived in the *Winnie Mae*, rain was teeming down. As the huge tri-motored machine came to a standstill, Captain Jimmy Bell hurried to open the cabin door.

"I got the shock of my life," grinned Captain Jimmy afterward. "I found myself staring a black bear full in the face."

The redoubtable Jimmy Mattern, foiled in a second refueling attempt over Alaska, had consoled himself by adopting two pets, half-grown bear cubs, to which he allowed the freedom of the cosy cockpit.

Presently Captain Jimmy got another surprise. A strange big plane was slipping down right onto Portage Avenue. Again he hurried out to meet the visitor, hoping that no traffic fatality might result from this unscheduled putting down onto an avenue usually reserved for only earth-hugging vehicles.

In pelting rain, as they stepped from a white Vega monoplane, he greeted the newcomers. It was the valiant Colonel Reg Robbins and his engineer, Harold Jones, in their Tokyo-bound plane, the *Fort Worth*.

A second attempt to refuel over Alaska, Colonel Robbins confirmed to the airport manager, had also met with failure.

"The first time," explained Jimmy Mattern, "difficulties with the motor of the *Fort Worth* and the weather stopped us."

The second time, the weather alone made the scheme impossible.

"The weather was so bad," added Jimmy, "you couldn't see your hand in front of you."

Then they had decided upon a third flight, a nonstop diagonal continent-jump all the way from Fairbanks to Fort Worth. They were to refuel over Edmonton. Here, too, the weather defeated them.

"Seems like it's raining every time we reach Edmonton," grinned Nick Greener.

"In future I'll stick to passenger-carrying at Fort Worth," planned the disheartened Colonel Robbins.

Jimmy Mattern, the irrepressible dreamer, indicated that he would be back. He had his own secret ambition to fulfil, a world waiting to be conquered alone as soon as he could secure sufficient financial backing.

Next morning, with police properly restraining traffic from Edmonton's highway, the visitors took off from Portage Avenue, bounding away on the 1700-mile jump to their homes in Fort Worth.

If 1931 was notable for new long-distance records by "foreigners," it was equally notable for local achievement.

As well as buying out Commercial Airways, Western Canada now officially expanded its name to Canadian Airways and likewise expanded its investments and services. Wop May and others of the local staff of Commercial Airways were transferred to the new company, with Punch Dickins becoming superintendent at Edmonton of northern operations.

Toward Great Bear the press of traffic and freight was blossoming still wider, as new fortune seekers and already established concerns competed to share in the staking and proving of claims.

So, as well as maintaining the mail-passenger-freight route down the Athabasca-Mackenzie posts, four giant Fokkers belonging to Canadian Airways were allotted especially to the Great Bear run. Piloted by Dickins, Gilbert, Archie McMullen and Jack Bythell, the four machines hustled men and supplies and ore to and from this new prospectors' paradise.

From time to time, too, specially chartered flights were spear-

heading out into regions never before visited by man-made birds of the air. Such a flight was achieved by Pilot Bill Spence, one of the searchers in the great hunt for the MacAlpine party.

Flying for his independent Spence-McDonough Air Transportation Company, which had now set up headquarters at Edmonton, one day before the fall "in-between" season, Spence flung a northern loop still farther into the forbidding polar regions. With Inspector Bonnycastle of the Hudson's Bay Company as his passenger, he took off from Coppermine, which Captain "Pat" Reid and Pilot Jimmy Vance had first reached by air just two years before.

Pointing northwest, he skimmed over the Arctic water and ice to reach, three hundred miles distant, the Walker Bay post high up on the west coast of Victoria Island. Wisely, that same day he steered his ship back to the mainland. This was a flight to penetrate some 150 miles nearer to the top of the world than had Gilbert and Major Burwash the previous summer.

North from Alberta's capital into all the sub-Arctic trading posts, by now the mail and passenger and freight planes had pretty well established themselves. They could count on both the cream and the milk of the air commerce. Nearer home, particularly in the Peace and Lesser Slave Lake areas and in the untapped British Columbia north, there was a chance that an unemployed young pilot might pick up a profitable penny or two. If only he could find someone, perhaps a helpful uncle, to stake him to an aeroplane.

In the autumn of 1931 just such a determined young pilot had the luck to find such a helpful uncle.



## 1931-1932

At first only piquant bits of rumour attended the founding of the one-man one-plane company.

"Remember that freckle-faced kid who used to hang around the airport?"

"Yeah. McConachie. Grant McConachie. Used to wait around for odd jobs, washing down planes, watching for any chance he could grab to get up in the air."

"Seems his uncle in Vancouver has grub-staked him to a plane. I hear he's gone north freighting fish."

These first incomplete reports of the new enterprise begun in 1931 suggested something of the unquenchable spirit of the young man behind this fresh venture.

As a growing lad, Grant wanted first to be a locomotive engineer. One day he watched the graceful motions of an aeroplane swooping down toward the Blatchford Field not far from his home. Then and there he decided he wanted most of all to fly.

He began to haunt the airport, watching especially the ships that lifted their wings toward the enchanted north and dreaming of the far regions they challenged.

In 1929, after a spell of cadet training with the R.C.A.F., at Camp Borden, Grant enrolled at the Aero Club as the 700th pupil of Instructor Burbidge. The following year he qualified for his private flying license and then for his commercial ticket.

But times were tough and there were no jobs waiting about for eager pilots.

"Why don't you go to China?" suggested a friend. "You could get a good job there at \$300 a month, flying planes for the Chinese National Air Lines."

*En route* to the fabled Orient, Grant turned up at the home of an uncle, Harry McConachie, in Vancouver. His kindly uncle, so the

story goes, saw what a waste would be entailed if this strapping youngster were presently to be sleeping beneath Chinese skies. He discovered that the determined young man knew where he could positively find profitable employment back home in Alberta, if only he had an aeroplane. He loaned him the funds to buy a second-hand plane and thereby opened a fresh chapter in the story of Edmonton and district aviation.

From the cold northern Alberta lakes, in the winter season, fishermen shoving their nets through holes in the translucent ice pulled forth abundant harvests of whitefish and lake trout. These, if served absolutely fresh, were in great demand as a delicacy on Chicago tables. The chief difficulty faced by the shippers was how to keep them chilled, but not frozen, over the long haul by horse and sleigh from lake to refrigerator car. Only the aeroplane, believed Grant, could shorten that haul sufficiently to guarantee absolutely fresh unfrozen fish.

With the second-hand Fokker he proceeded to Cold Lake, as birds fly 200 miles northeast from Edmonton. There, for the Burwash Fish Company, he picked up a trial load of whitefish. Within minutes, he was off for the refrigerated rail car at Bonnyville, thirty miles to the southwest.

He whizzed along the snow-skirted horizon. In thirty minutes the men were loading the fish from plane to rail car.

"The fish were still kicking," chuckled Grant afterward, "when they packed them in the refrigerator cars."

Everyone was delighted—fishermen, shippers, American caterers and gourmets. This air-freighted fish was delicious.

Grant had got himself a job. In the next forty-five days, he spent some 273 hours in the air, flying hundreds of pounds of fish on the first link of the long road to the market.

"It was the hardest work I ever did," he admitted.

That one season's freighting paid back the cost of the Fokker. Presently he was able to find a couple of partners, Prince and Princess Galitzine, who were willing to lend capital. He organized himself into a company, to be known as Independent Airways.

Soon he was joining in the popular transport pattern, freighting mining equipment to northern points. Sometimes his load was made up with fresh fruit and vegetables, which he sold on the spot to raise money to buy more gas for the Fokker,

"Oranges," he chuckled later in more secure days, "were fifty cents apiece, right fresh out of the plane."

On one of these venturings into the northwest, his route led him right up into the Yukon as far as Whitehorse. The possibilities of such a route extending on to Alaska and thence to the Orient that he had once set out to reach, suggested what might in the distant future be accomplished.

He arranged for the financing of two more second-hand Fokkers, hired two pilots, Ted Field and Ernie Kubicek, and with the next winter's arrival, he was back hauling fish.

One cold morning he was zipping away from the Blatchford Field when bad luck struck. Ice coating the propeller sent the plane smacking down on the snow-covered frozen ground just beyond the airfield.

"The plane was in pieces and so were McConachie's bones." Thus a report added it all up.

"I'm sorry it happened," he called to his mechanic, Chris Green, as they were being extricated from the wreckage.

"I'm all right if you are," Green tried to grin through bleeding lips and broken teeth.

Green was soon patched up and operations pieced together Grant's broken bones. But the Fokker was a writeoff. From his hospital bed, he continued to direct his company's fish-hauling. There was plenty of time, too, to meditate on safety precautions for flyers.

"Then and there I decided," he summed up later, "that all daredevil flying, through canyons, under bridges, low over rooftops, was bad business." Grant McConachie never had another crack-up.

Two months before the doctors said he would be able to walk again, he hobbled out on crutches. Two weeks on convalescence decided him it was high time to get back to the fish camp. There he found crutches in the deep snow and the rough terrain nothing but an unbearable nuisance. He tossed them away and soon stomped his way back to rugged health.

Three months after his accident, he was back in the air, fish-hauling in another old Fokker. When a friend "washed up" this machine, and a Moth that his company had bought was seized for hangar rent, he seemed doomed to failure.

Now he knew the bitter taste of defeat that had so often been Wop May's lot.

"I was broke and a flop after one year in the air business."

He was going to have to use to the full his powers of persuasion to find more capital and more machines.

There were, in 1932, many other dark days for aviators and aviation.

There was that black day in the spring when Paul Calder spiralled down to the Blatchford Field. A black day because with it Paul brought the last mail to be flown on the Winnipeg-Edmonton air circuit.

No longer would the drone of motors carrying the mail be heard through the hours of the night. The depression had so tightened its stranglehold on the country that rigid measures of economy must be enforced. The cross-Canada air-mail service was a luxury, a service that government coffers could no longer finance.

"What are you going to do?" the suddenly unemployed pilots were asked.

"We don't know. First we'll take a holiday, then look around and see what there is to do. The ground has sort of dropped away from under us."

Several of the senior prairie pilots, Andy Cruickshank, Paul Calder and Con Farrell, were transferred to the Mackenzie River service of Canadian Airways. The great beacons that transformed with their golden shafts the long stretches of the lonely prairies were dismantled, the night air that crackled with radio direction signals for the pilots, was stilled.

Sadly Edmonton shrugged her sturdy pioneer shoulders. Then, with a gleam in her eyes, she remembered the nuggets of rich metal and the chunks of precious ore that had been dropped into her pockets and that had been borne to her by wings out of the north.

Wider still she opened the gate that led to her still promising hinterland. Wider, too, she opened welcoming arms to the men, the "bush" pilots who were bringing her increasing commerce from those areas lighted by the mystic glow of the aurora borealis.

With the loss of the prairie mail contract, Canadian Airways increasingly turned its attention to the northland, where it still held that contract taken over from Commercial Airways for the world's longest, most northerly mail route. There it continued to pile up new records of hours and miles flown and new flights inaugurated.

One innovation, too, the company tried for central Alberta. This

was a strictly passenger and express service, with two flights each way daily, between Edmonton and Calgary.

Initiating the new run southward, at eight o'clock on the morning of May 2, Paul Calder roared into the air at the controls of a huge Fokker. This flight from the Blatchford Field marked the beginning of the first schedule of its kind in Canada.

If this new task of Paul's had his neighbours at home recalling that it was less than five years since he had joined the jubilee Dominion Day celebrations to display an aeroplane's capabilities, a recent chore accomplished by Wop May sent minds spinning still farther back.

Away above the rim of the Arctic Circle, west of Arctic Red River, lived a mysterious trapper named Albert Johnson. Silently and alone the previous summer, he had made his way out of the Yukon by river raft and set himself up in a little cabin on the bank of the Rat River.

Soon the Loucheux Indians, resenting his intrusion into their hunting grounds, complained that he was interfering with their traps. The stranger obviously shunned mankind and let it be known that especially he hated the mounted police.

Acompanied by an Indian guide, Constable A. W. King and Constable R. McDowell were sent to interview the mystery man. At the cabin door, their shouts demanding entrance were met with a shower of bullets, one of which wounded Constable King. Next a group under Inspector A. N. Eames made a trip from Aklavik, eighty miles distant, travelling by dog-team to the little shack on the old Yukon trail.

"Come out," roared the Inspector into the echoing silence.

Another volley of bullets was the answer from the tiny cabin.

For fifteen hours, police and trapper intermittently blazed away, and the besiegers hurled dynamite onto the roof of the building. Finally, lack of supplies forced the mounties to "retreat" to Aklavik.

Reinforced with more men and more supplies, the attackers returned. They found the cabin deserted and their quarry gone. At once they set out to track him, following him through the snow on winter-desolate hills and winding river valleys.

Westward into the Yukon mountains, the trapper headed, often cleverly backtracking to confuse his pursuers.

At last behind a rough shelter of brush, they saw their man. Before

they could capture him, he had dropped another mountie, Constable E. Millen, formerly of Edmonton. This time the wound was mortal.

At this tragic turn of events, in the policeman's home city an interviewer talked with the northern superintendent of Canadian Airways, Punch Dickins.

"Yes," agreed Punch. "An aeroplane could be used to advantage in the drive to get Johnson. It could bomb his stronghold from the air." Gilbert, May or Cruickshank, he added, were all wartime aviators with the right kind of experience.

Next day came official word from the mounted police authorities. Captain Wop May was to be asked to assist.

"Remember," recalled those with long memories, "that day back in 1919 when Wop got permission to fly the *Edmonton* out to Edson to help the police get Larsen?"

Punch hustled to fly supplies, including ammunition and tear-gas bombs, up to Wop at McMurray. Next day, from that point, Wop zoomed off toward the frigid Arctic and Aklavik to lend aerial assistance.

Again winter weather offered its hampering utmost of wind and blizzard. Twice from Aklavik Wop swooped westward into the Rat River foothills of the bordering Yukon. All his long experience he needed now to call into play. From time to time he was confronted with blinding storm and temperatures dipping sometimes to fifty below zero, and he was flying in unknown wild terrain with few suitable landing spots.

Once Wop himself was reported missing, somewhere in the storm-swept Yukon hills.

Presently he showed up, made contact with the pursuing posse and demonstrated the usefulness of an aeroplane by ferrying to and from Aklavik with supplies. Within an hour he brought necessities for the men that would have required a dog-team a haul of at least twenty hours.

Then one day Wop spotted the hunted man, backtracking on the Eagle River. So also did the pursuers. Bullets whizzed back and forth. Hunters and hunted were so close that the pilot, hovering above in the aeroplane, dared not interfere. One man dropped in the snow as they prepared to close in.

Finally Wop signalled that the defiant Johnson had fired his last bullet. He hurried to get down on the river bed near where lay the wounded man, Staff Sergeant E. F. Hersey of the Royal Canadian



Signals. Again he demonstrated the usefulness of the aeroplane by snatching him up and rushing him back to Aklavik and medical care.

For Pilot May and for the police the dramatic and tragic episode was closed. The two wounded men recovered. Constable Millen was brought home to Edmonton for burial. The defiant Albert Johnson was buried in a bleak Arctic grave. And to this day no one has yet been able to solve satisfactorily the mystery of the true identity of this lone trapper of Rat River.

Already in this era of growing reputation for aviation, stories of all the mercy flights out of and into Edmonton alone would overflow a book. Of the dozens undertaken by the pilots, many were, like those flights of Wop May into the Yukon hills, coincident with the worst possible weather.

Typical of the dangerous cat-and-mouse game the airmen played with the weather was the kind of unforgettable experience that befell Pilot Archie McMullen and Engineer Harry King.

It was the hazardous edge of the in-between season. At McMurray, the sub-station of Canadian Airways, Archie's plane was up on blocks, ready for change-over. At 7:30 of a Sunday evening came word from Smith, away above the top of Alberta near the boundary line.

Slogging seventy-five miles from a remote farther north point, a trapper had just arrived at Smith with news that there a nine-year-old boy had shot himself through the foot, that gangrene had set in, and that the lad was in urgent need of medical aid.

Already at McMurray on the day before, Saturday, the Athabasca had apparently frozen solid. The next day, Sunday, some hours before word of the emergency arrived, a small channel of open water had reappeared.

All that Sunday night Engineer Harry King worked over the plane. At 4 a.m. he was able to report, "She's ready."

In the dull light of dawn, willing hands turned out to help shove the plane, still pontoon-shod, out into the little channel. Through the soft edging ice she smashed for some thirty feet before she reached the open water.

As Pilot McMullen gave her the gun, it was so cold that spray from the floats froze on the under carriage and tailplane. He contrived to rise and gain height. Away he winged on his errand of mercy.

Four hundred miles to the north, near where the boy lay ill, he had the great luck to find, on a small secluded lake, a landing-spot free of ice. He picked up the injured lad and hurried him to hospital at Smith, where the foot was saved from amputation.

Next day Archie zipped hastily back to McMurray. There further good fortune had preserved that open channel on the Athabasca. Four hours later, the water had once more become a solid mass of ice.

Not always did luck ride with these men of the sky, whose utmost skill and knowledge were so often called upon to bring them through every kind of weather, every kind of contingency.

Faced with a "glassy water" landing at Hunter Bay on Great Bear's east shore and blinded by fog and smoke and the water's glare, Pilot Jimmy Vance was the first casualty of the Great Bear mining rush. As his plane smacked down with a terrific impact, he was thrown from the cockpit and drowned.

Another of his flying comrades who, like Vance, had ranged many miles on the northern airways and, like him too, had shared the hazards of the great MacAlpine search, Pilot Bill Spence lost his life in an accident near The Pas.

Then one summer day in 1932, the man who had outdistanced all the others in the MacAlpine hunt, Andy Cruickshank, was missing on the run between Fort Rae on Great Slave and Echo Bay on Great Bear. In heavy timber on a steep hillside, Gilbert and Parmenter spotted the twisted wreckage of the blue and yellow Fokker. With Andy had died two mechanics, "Hod" Horace Tory of Edmonton and Harry King of Cadogan.

This first fatal accident involving a Canadian Airways plane in the north was due, it was decided, to a part of the cylinder head breaking loose, and smashing through the windshield to strike the pilot full in the face.

With full military honours, the world war veterans Andy and "Hod" were laid to rest in an Edmonton cemetery and Harry King was buried at his home in the east-central Alberta village of Cadogan. Friends and air-comrades, recalling their diligence and their exploits, noted particularly that Andy's adventures would fill a book.

As a teen-age lad, Andy had flown with the Royal Flying Corps in the embattled skies of France. Then he had served five years as a "mountie" traversing the Yukon wildernesses by canoe and dog-sled.

In the air again by 1924, he flew with the Yukon Airways there and in Alaska until 1928, when he came "out" to join Western Canada Airways.

As mail pilot he learned the topography of the sweeping prairies and in 1929, as senior search pilot in the far-ranging hunt for the MacAlpine expedition, he rang up the impressive distance of 7000 miles traversed over the northern barrens and the sub-Arctic tundra.

"An awfully good chap," Captain Jimmy Bell paid tribute to his friend. Then he recalled an illustrative incident in Andy's life.

"I remember his telling me about a strange experience he had in the Yukon with a husky dog. Andy noticed that the mouth and jaws of the poor beast were pincushioned with porcupine quills. Its stolid Indian masters paid no heed to its pitiful suffering.

"Andy got hold of the dog and presently it permitted him to remove the needles. Strangely enough, when a second time the foolish beast battled with a porcupine, it came of its own accord to Andy to have the quills removed. That," concluded Captain Jimmy, "was the kind of chap Andy was."

Seven months later, another maker of air-history, Pilot Paul Calder, came home to Edmonton for the last time.

In a blinding snowstorm, accompanied by his engineer Bill Nadin, he crashed, too, in the area between Fort Rae and Great Bear on what had become known as "the meat run."

Like Andy, Paul had flown the route many times. Like him, he knew the prairie air trails, the northern British Columbia mountain and the Yukon and the Peace River regions and the far north vastnesses. Many times, too, death had so nearly crowded with him into the cockpit.

"If it's to come," he once told his father, the former South Edmonton alderman, Hugh Calder, "I hope it comes quickly."

Wop May, discovering the badly-wrecked plane and the frozen bodies, saw that it had indeed come quickly.

In spite of mishap and tragedy, in spite of almost overwhelming obstacle and hardship, the mineral regions in the Great Bear area continued to booming development. Late in 1932, Leigh Brintnell, the man who had first circumnavigated from the air that immense inland sea, envisioned even greater possibilities for air transport. He determined to found a sky service of his own.

Though his capabilities had directed the establishment of Western Canada and Canadian Airways in the successful pioneering of many vast areas, it was not easy to coax forth, in this period of general depression, the capital necessary to form a new company. Up and down the land Leigh hunted in vain for financial assistance. Finally he hit upon a possibility.

Over in Hasbrouck Heights the man known as the Flying Dutchman, Anthony Fokker, was now well established in his American air-machine factory.

As a very young man, before World War One, Brintnell knew, the wizard inventor Fokker had gone from his native Holland to seek aid in Britain for the manufacture of his new-type aerial inventions. The British refused to consider such a project.

Fokker had then appealed to German interests. Upon seeing the superiority of his aeroplane designs, the Germans agreed to assist him. With the outbreak of the war, Fokker made his own terms with them. For his planes, he was to be paid in gold, which he could ship out of the country.

So, at war's end, Fokker took his patents from disorganized Europe to the United States. There, with the aid of funds he had in store in North America, he was soon manufacturing his sturdy new machines.

On this continent one of his best customers had been the company or companies belonging to his friend, James A. Richardson of Western Canada and Canadian Airways.

All this Leigh Brintnell recalled as, by telephone, he asked for an interview. The wizard inventor, Anthony Fokker, invited him to visit him at his home high up on the Hudson Pallisades.

Briefly Leigh told him of his dream to found a company of his own, of the possibilities for even greater aerial expansion in Canada's Northwest.

"Would you lend me the money?" he asked the great Dutchman.

At the moment, there was no reply for him. The lightning mind of his host had leapt on to some other theme.

Presently, it was time for Leigh to go. Still the wizard brain jumped from topic to topic, appearing to have completely forgotten the errand on which his guest had come.

Briefly, at last, Leigh reminded him. Without a word he went to a desk and wrote a cheque.

With two brand-new Fokkers and a modest office in Edmonton, Leigh was soon launching his Mackenzie Air Services upon its northward path. He hired two seasoned pilots who shared his indomitable spirit, Matt Berry and Stan McMillan.

Watching the little company attempt chores that were seemingly impossible of accomplishment, the growing coterie of air-minded around the city was reminded of a significant story about its soft-spoken aggressive executive-pilot.

During World War One in the Royal Flying Corps, Brintnell had quickly demonstrated his flying skill and was detailed to the post of instructor. One afternoon a young lad, doing unauthorized stunting with a plane, got into serious difficulty. He swerved wrong-side up to the ground, decapitating himself.

Noting how horribly shaken by the accident were the other young trainees at the base, Leigh hustled to restore morale. Quickly he streaked up sky in another machine and performed the same manoeuvre, putting himself in a like predicament. Then coolheadedly, he successfully pulled out of it.

This man, then, who bore the reputation of never asking a pilot to do what he would not himself undertake, in the depth of that first winter, 1932-1933, contracted to carry 500 pounds of fresh vegetables to the Eldorado Mining Company's camp on Great Bear. He devised a special heating contraption in the plane and sped the delicate freight through the sub-zero skies. Not one "spud" was frozen when the consignment reached its destination.

Then, with the skilled assistance of the hardy Berry and McMillan, he attempted a typically stupendous chore. Within five days, they raced the spring break-up to hoist ten tons of mining equipment and provisions from Fort Rae to Great Bear's frozen shore.

Cruising hither and yon, picking up passengers and freight sometimes half a continent apart, one day down at the Blatchford Field and the next at some sub-Arctic lake or river, Mackenzie Air Services machines soon won themselves the reputation of being never on the ground, except for loading or unloading intervals. The little company began to flourish.

Already Stan McMillan, who had been one of the first pilots to invade the Barrens in winter and who had spent those long fearsome hours with the "lost" MacAlpine party, was equally at home in the

Yukon, or a couple of thousand miles east on the west shore of Hudson Bay, or on the long thoroughfare leading from Edmonton to Great Bear Lake.

Before the spring break-up of 1933, President Brintnell assigned him a typical chore, a chore that rated as one of the top achievements of this "bush-flying" era.

A party of eight prospectors, headed by the veteran Fred Tigert, wanted transportation to the headwater region of the Upper Liard River, where they planned to search for gold. Here, more than a thousand miles northwest of the city, they were to spend the whole summer.

Striking off from Edmonton on March 24, McMillan presently swung down at Fort St. John, the Peace River country outpost within the British Columbia borders. There the tall laconic pilot picked up the first load of the 8000 pounds of supplies and equipment, along with the eight prospectors, that he was to waft to the headwaters of the Upper Liard.

Two hundred and eighty miles beyond, at Nelson Forks, he completed the first stage of the first flight, sinking down into four feet of soft snow that completely buried the plane's undercarriage.

He was able to enlist the help of a crew of six white men and fifteen Indians. Together, with the aid of snowshoes, they shovelled and tramped, shovelled and tramped. Finally he had a runway nearly a quarter of a mile long flattened out in the mushy snow.

Overnight, the temperature dropped low enough to freeze solid this giant white pan. Thus, as long as he got away early enough in the morning, he was provided with a splendidly firm base for take-off.

Seven trips in all between Fort St. John and Nelson Forks saw the party of prospectors and the four tons of supplies safely down at the end of the first stage.

Above high and treacherous mountain ranges the next stage led. His aerial path belted over 250 miles where there was no landing-spot, over the celebrated Tropical Valley, where steam billowing from the hot springs did nothing to improve the visibility.

On one lift, a blinding blizzard forced him down on a tiny lake nestled between towering peaks. Soon he was surrounded with inquisitive visitors, a huge herd of caribou who ventured within two hundred yards of the great green and gold bird that had sought refuge on the ice.



Eventually he settled all the miners and their weighty gear into camp, with the promise that he would return in the autumn to pick up both them and their pokes of gold.

Back in his home town, he shrugged off the accomplishment with a characteristic grunt.

The mountains and the prospect of forced landings didn't worry him a bit. So insisted this pilot who had previously put in two years of flying in the Yukon and who had, during that period, hopped with gold hunters all over the northern ranges.

"It was shovelling snow that got me," he added disgustedly. "I must have moved enough snow to completely cover Edmonton. If it wasn't for those two-hundred-pound prospectors digging in and helping, I'd still be at it."

Now Alberta's frontier city was getting used to the idea that any and all of the pilots might one day drop on wheels or skis to the Blatchford Field or on pontoons on the river or at the Cooking Lake anchorage. And that the next day they might be a thousand miles distant in some wilderness camp. Obviously, they would stop at nothing.

Just the same, residents were a bit startled to read the headline, one day in August, "Planes land in jail." Reading on, they discovered that it was only another bit of work by the resourceful head of the new Mackenzie Air Services.

On the grounds of the Fort Saskatchewan jail, eight miles from the city, stretched a fine table of lawn sloping right down to river water. The two green and gold Fokkers had now to change from wheels to pontoons. Manager Brintnell got permission from the warden to land on the slope, the two Fokkers plumped cautiously down, taxied to the water's edge, and the changeover was easily effected.

A reporter, surveying the accomplishments to date of the bronzed and broad-shouldered head of the young Mackenzie Air Services Company, glowingly commended his work.

"Brintnell's vision," he added up, "has enlarged the status of aviation in the north. It was he who guided its growth from Gypsy flying days to air-mail services, he who ordered the first commercial plane into the Mackenzie River country. He has organized air lines, selected routes, directed the placing of bases and cache supplies."

Lightly passing off the commendation with a shrug of the sturdy shoulders, Leigh took time to offer a shrewd forecast of what the future would soon offer in the way of easier times for aviation.

"Soon," he predicted, "we'll be flying in the upper air in big ships at five hundred miles an hour. There there are no storms. Radio will guide them and bring them down safely."

Then, with a characteristic quick step that was almost a run, he was off again, to undertake another feat that was the talk of the town and of the north country for months after.

He had just bought a third plane for his company, a smart new-style Fokker with a 600-horse-power engine and a cruising speed of 122 miles an hour.

At Fort Norman had been unloaded fifty tons of vitally important freight needed at the mining camps on Echo Bay, at the eastern end of Great Bear. If this freight could be quickly moved, before the impending early freeze-up, over the Bear River portage to Fort Franklin on the lakeshore, boats could then still transfer it to Echo Bay before winter set in.

"Yes," agreed Brintnell, "I'll undertake to move it."

Move it he did, all fifty tons.

In eleven flying days, he made, with the new plane, five one-hundred-and-sixty-mile round trips each day. At the end of those fifty-five trips, he had lifted all the freight to Fort Franklin. Packed also into the short September days were all the landings and the take-offs, the loading and the unloadings, the refuelings and all the hundred and one minor details attached to the job.

These challenging years were to grow into golden years for the tiny companies, Grant McConachie's Independent Airways, Leigh Brintnell's Mackenzie Air Services, and for the hustling giant, Canadian Airways.

They were to grow, too, into golden years for the modest air harbour presided over by Captain Jimmy Bell and for the home-teaching club ruled over by the ace instructor, Captain "Moss" Burbidge.

Each year since "Moss" had taken over, citizens read with monotonous regularity, "Edmonton club leads all Canada in air activities." Then there was beamed forth a new announcement to impel a tremendous fresh wave of civic pride. Captain Burbidge had won the McKee trophy for 1932.

"His really splendid work and continuous good service," cited the commendation praising the job done by "Moss," rated him "as the best instructor" in the Dominion.

He is "mainly responsible," it continued, "for that club having first place in the past four years." He has "an excellent record of service in the advancement of civil aviation."

While Captain "Moss," strict as ever with those in his charge, carried on his daily work with the local boys, the harbour-master, Captain Jimmy, was kept busy maintaining a smooth-operating schedule that included the comings and goings of the three commercial companies as well as a growing tide of visitors.

Then came a day flashing word of not one, but two, pending visits by birdmen of special renown.

## 1933

FIRST OF THE FAMOUS planning to whirr down upon the Blatchford Field was the irrepressible Jimmy Mattern.

During the previous summer of 1932, Jimmy and Bennett Griffin had made a gallant try to beat that round-the-world record of Post and Gatty in the *Winnie Mae*. They had written to Manager Bell asking for arrangements to be completed for their landing in Edmonton.

Again, Bell had appealed to City Engineer Haddow for permission for the globe-girdlers to use Portage Avenue.

"If they attempt to make a nonstop flight to New York," he explained, "they would need to load 600 gallons of gasoline. Even with a dry field, I doubt if the machine could be got into the air from the airport field."

Permission to lift from Portage had been granted and Captain Bell had completed all preliminary arrangements. But the unlucky pair had been forced to terminate their flight when they smashed down in a Russian peat bog.

Now "hard-luck" Jimmy Mattern was going to try to pluck an even higher star from the aviation firmament. He was going to try to be the first flyer to solo, all alone, right round the globe. A news report of his departure from New York set his acquaintances in Edmonton a-smiling.

This "aerial jack of all work," it announced, "with six oranges in his pocket and a grin on his lips, hopped off from Floyd Bennett Field to try a single-handed girdling of the globe."

"All I need," beamed Jimmy, "is these oranges in my pocket and a good tail-wind to reach Moscow."

Again headlines began to follow the flight, around the earth's circumference, of the red, white and blue monoplane, *Century of Progress*.

At the city's air harbour, again Captain Bell completed arrangements, including authority to have Portage Avenue cleared in readiness. Again N.B.C. broadcasters arrived in the city from New York

to spread word to a waiting world of an earth-circling arrival in Alberta's capital.

Alas, again, for "hard-luck" Jimmy. All the way to Khabarovsk in eastern Siberia his courageous challenge was successful.

Then, while Edmonton's citizens began to watch every plane putting in an appearance over their Blatchford Field in case it might be Jimmy's *Century of Progress*, came the sad news. Jimmy was unreported at Nome.

Before him, upon leaving Khabarovsk, as with Post and Gatty, lay the Sea of Okhotsk, the Kamchatka Peninsula, the lonely tundra of the northeastern tip of Asia and the Bering Sea. Somewhere, in the vast wilderness of mountain and tundra, of sea and fog, extending between Khabarovsk and Nome, he had vanished.

Presently a "Mattern rescue plane," piloted by William Alexander of New York, was spiralling down on the Blatchford Field. There was a brief stop while its bulky tanks were refilled with the heavy load of gasoline needed for the long 2100-mile jump to Alaska. Then from Portage Avenue the blue Bellanca quickly streaked away, bound on its distant errand of mercy.

Pilot Alexander planned a five-week search of the lonely lands and silent seas between Khabarovsk and Nome. Around town, many shook their heads at the futility of such a hunt. An editorial in one of the local newspapers practically wrote Jimmy off, admitting gloomily that the possibility of his being found alive "hangs by a very slender thread."

For twenty-three days Edmonton waited for word. Then, when it appeared certain that the editorial was right in its guess and that he was lost forever, there came a garbled message. From Anadyr, a tiny settlement on the Chukotka Peninsula on the northeastern tip of Siberia, this message had been somehow spelled out. Its meaning was quite definite. Jimmy Mattern was alive.

As everyone rushed to maps to locate the isolated post, they remembered that Raold Amundsen had turned up there in 1920, after having apparently been lost in the polar seas for a year and a half. It was after that futile expedition that he had presently commissioned Pilot Fullerton to help him reach the pole.

Excitement at the glad word about smiling Jimmy was keyed to an even higher pitch when news flashes confirmed that another globe-girdler, Wiley Post, was again whirling round Mother Earth. This time he, too, was trying for a solo record.

Before racing away from Floyd Bennett field, again in the *Winnie Mae*, Wiley wired explicit instructions to Captain Bell at Edmonton: "Five hundred gallons of gasoline, please, and forty gallons of oil. Please have in readiness to refuel within fifteen minutes, and please have the crowd cleared from Portage Avenue so as not to delay my takeoff."

Again, as with the previous flight of the *Winnie Mae*, and just days ago with Jimmy Mattern, residents hurried out maps to follow his course. Once the word arrived that he had reached and departed from Moscow, they pored over the strange-sounding Siberian names.

Again American radio men rushed to the city to await his arrival. Again newsmen began to gather. Again Captain Jimmy Bell got permission for the use of Portage Avenue, and again everything was hustled to readiness.

Unlike "hard luck" Jimmy, Wiley and the *Winnie Mae* survived the bad weather that began to dog them as they skipped onward from Novo Sibirsk. Edmontonians were beginning to roll almost familiarly the long Siberian names off their tongues as they checked Wiley's progress from Irkutsk to Blagoveschensk.

Then came the glad word. Wiley had been sighted over Nome. Impatiently, crowds began to collect at the Blatchford Field, prepared to wait through the night, if necessary, to give the great Wiley once more the rousing welcome due to a hero returned.

"Whatever has happened to him? Where is he?" anxious watchers queried as no Wiley appeared.

In their hearts they knew too well what might have happened. They knew that the one-eyed solitary flyer was challenging a mountainous wilderness between Nome and Alberta's capital that was choked with flying risks.

At length came word. Alaska again had been unkind to the *Winnie Mae's* propeller. Wiley had been forced down at Flat in the "forty-ninth state" and he had this time so severely damaged the propeller that he had to await a new one that was being hurried to him from Fairbanks.

He would arrive, the waiting crowds were told, late Friday or early Saturday. Reluctantly they went home to snatch some sleep and Friday evening they resumed their vigil round the Blatchford Field.

At this point from a well-known eastern Canadian came some





Forced down by complete engine failure, this plane owned by N.A.M.E. and piloted by Frank Baragar was towed by twenty-six dogs to Fort Rae.

Leigh Brintnell (*left*) and Stan McMillan (*right*) with the Eldorado Radium Silver Express, bringing out the first load of radium ore concentrate from the Great Bear Lake region.

Taxiing onto Lake Athabasca, this big Bellanca of Mackenzie Air Services hit a crack and submerged, costing a salvage job of several thousand dollars.



The Junkers team belonging to Canadian Airways, AMZ and ARI, join planes of Mackenzie Air Services at Great Bear Lake, in August, 1933.

The celebrated tri-motor with which Grant McConachie transported a million pounds of northern fish to rail lines.

pertinent comment. "Edmonton," remarked Premier George Drew of Ontario, "is the most air-minded city in Canada."

It was as if Premier Drew had in mind the thousands waiting into the breaking dawn for the lone American, waiting for the *Winnie Mae*, the stout ship that was apparently going to have the "get-up" to circle, without faltering, twice round the globe.

From radio and loudspeaker came the great words. At ten minutes past six on that Saturday morning, the *Winnie Mae* had been sighted. She was passing over Mayerthorpe, just seventy miles northwest of Edmonton.

The half-sleeping crowd crushed forward, to be joined by hundreds of other quickly roused citizens. The city police and the scarlet-clad mounties straightened their shoulders and put new zest into their step as they pushed the people back within the safety zone.

A speck appeared in the western sky. Then it was blotted out by a pelting shower that sent watchers scurrying for cars and shelter. The speck reappeared and grew larger.

No doubt of it now. It was the *Winnie Mae*. Again the unbelievable had happened. This time, it was even more unbelievable. Here was a solitary man, a solitary ship, racing over the solitary spaces of wide oceans and broad continents.

The *Winnie Mae* swung easterly, appearing to miss the Blatchford Field. Dismayed and breathless, the tense thousands watched. The *Winnie Mae* swung back. A rising sun burst through the clouds to bathe in gold and crimson the rain-drenched wings of the sturdy ship. She circled the field twice and swerved down to a perfect three-point landing. The crowds began cheering themselves hoarse.

Captain Jimmy rushed up, opened the cabin door and shook hands with the pilot. For a minute the Oklahoman sat dazed, a white eye-patch blotting the blind eye.

"That was a pretty good show you put up," began Harbour-Master Jimmy.

"Thanks," said Wiley, rousing himself enough to clamber out of the cockpit. Supported on the one side by Captain Jimmy, on the other by Police Sergeant Alex. Riddell, he allowed himself to be led toward the hangar.

"How do you feel?" queried the former.

"Fine. But I've a terrible headache from flying at high altitude.

Apart from that, I'm all right. I'm not as tired as I was in the 1931 flight. The automatic pilot saved me."

Waving to the roaring crowds, he entered the hangar.

A robot pilot device in the *Winnie Mae*, Wiley explained, had been of considerable help. In this mechanism he had great faith.

"I was able to snatch a little sleep on the way in, while the robot flew the ship. But I didn't doze for long at a time," he added with a weary grin, "for I wanted to dodge the mountain peaks."

At once a crew of men took over the wonder plane and Wiley was lying on a couch in the hangar, an icepack over the aching head. At the door to guard him from the over-enthusiastic crowds was a scarlet-coated mounted policeman.

Catching sight of the mountie, Wiley beckoned him over.

"You know, I always wanted to be a mountie," he greeted the man.

Less taciturn than on the previous visit, soon he seemed to forget his weariness as he smiled and quietly chatted.

"Did you see Jimmy Mattern's ship?" This of course every one now knew was lying wrecked near the Anadir river on the outermost tip of Siberia.

"No. I was flying in fog then. I couldn't see the ground at all."

"You sure look much better," Captain Bell reassured him, "than the last time you were here."

"I am better. I feel great except for this headache."

Presently Captain Jimmy checked with his watch. If this marathon flyer were to give a good sound beating to his previous record, he must be speeded on his way.

"I don't want to rush you, Wiley. But your plane is ready and you've been here exactly fifty-five minutes."

"That's great, then. Let's go."

Smiling and waving his thanks to the packed ranks of shouting spectators, he was conveyed over to Portage Avenue and the freshly fuelled *Winnie Mae*. This time the police redoubled their vigilance and no surging crowds delayed the departure.

The lone pilot, white eye-patch angled over his face, climbed into the cockpit. Captain Jimmy grasped his hand.

"Good luck and God bless you."

The propeller was whirling again, Wiley worked the controls, and the wonder ship taxied down Portage as her pilot waved to the sea

of cheering faces. Half way down she started to rise. Soon she was pointing east into the clouds.

This time they had not long to wait for the glad news of an epic joyfully ended. Late that night the *Winnie Mae* completed the 2200-mile flight to New York, coming down to a thunderous reception at Floyd Bennett Field.

The hero returned had clipped twenty-one hours from his previous record with Navigator Gatty. A second time he had ridden to immortality. One-eyed and all alone, in seven days eighteen hours he had circled the earth at the 15,400 mile circumference.

Within a week the cheering citizens turned out again. This time they were to hail the heroic achievement of another soloist who "almost made it." Jimmy Mattern was to arrive in the "Mattern Rescue Plane."

To the waiting throng, details of his accident and his rescue had so far been sketchy. They knew that for a time the problem of rescuing him from Anadyr had been something of a stickler. Persistent bad weather had hampered flights out of Nome. Eventually the Soviet's most celebrated aviator and the man known as the Lindbergh of Russia, Sigmund Levaneffsky, solved the problem. Flying a monster seaplane with a group of four companions, in a long jump over the Siberian wildernesses Levaneffsky picked Jimmy up at Anadyr and ferried him over the treacherous Bering Sea to Nome.

For this flight, which in its entirety straddled some 10,000 miles, Captain Levaneffsky, for whom Edmonton was later to prepare a rousing welcome, was rewarded with the Soviet "Order of the Red Star."

From Nome, without further mishap, Pilot Alexander whisked Jimmy back to Edmonton. Crowds clustered about the Blatchford Field, clamouring to see Jimmy as the week before they had clamoured to hail Wiley Post. Smiling Jimmy climbed to the roof of the airport to speak to them and to convey his warm thanks for their welcome.

"When I see familiar faces here," he told them, "it seems just like home. I appreciate it all very much."

In Siberia, he found, problems of communication with the Russians and the Eskimos had been most hampering. "This is so much better,"



he assured every one, "than waving my arms around in Russia and drawing pictures on the sand."

His experiences at Anadyr, he reported cheerfully, had been pretty grim. "Ice was forming on the wings and the fog was so thick that I couldn't make Nome."

So he tried to reach the little Eskimo trading post at Anadyr. Finally he had to make a forced landing on the Arctic tundra, inflicting painful injury and burns upon himself and serious injury upon his plane.

"She landed with a sickening crash," he remembered.

Dragging a broken ankle, eventually he made his way to the Anadir River. There he fashioned a makeshift raft. He stumbled aboard. The raft sank, throwing him into the water. He contrived to patch together a second raft. Then, while the world was beginning to believe him gone forever, he crawled onto the second raft and lay there, weak and wasted and waiting for death.

"I thought it better," he grinned to bedazed Edmonton friends, "to get on a raft and die there, in case a boat came along. There'd be much more chance of finding me than if I died on the bank."

Presently some Eskimos did come along and discover him, still alive. They took him to Anadyr, where he sent out the news that delighted the world. While at Anadyr he waited for rescue he had been able to help Wiley Post by translating and sending off to him messages about the weather.

At the Blatchford Field, the three-times visitor to the city transferred to Imperial Oil's Puss Moth piloted by the celebrated Captain "Pat" Reid. Still "dead game," Jimmy promised to be back soon again on another try at tying that aerial rope round the waist of old Mother Earth.

"I'm ready to leave any time. I'm ready for anything."

With these jaunty words, he waved a farewell and was off for the east and a hero's welcome in New York city, almost two months since that day he had skimmed away with the smile on his lips and the six oranges in his pocket.

Spiced with equal daring were often the local flights that continued to challenge the northern wildernesses out of Edmonton.

Before the spring break-up, pilots of the three competing companies shuttled back and forth and to and fro, carrying unwieldy machinery to the Great Bear mining field, freighting furs, fish, pitch-



blende and other mineral ores, livestock, motion picture films, essential foods, turkeys, husky dogs, in short anything and everything that a northern resident might need or desire.

"Our pilots," computed Canadian Airways, "in 1932 in the MacKenzie River district between Edmonton and Aklavik flew more than sixteen times around the earth at the equator."

While Wiley Post and Jimmy Mattern were dreaming of new round-the-world records, at home Canadian Airways pilots H. Hollick-Kenyon and John Bythell were ringing up new records in elapsed flying time between Great Bear Lake and Edmonton's seaplane base at Cooking Lake, Leigh Brintnell was accomplishing the impossible in moving mountains of freight, and Grant McConachie and his "boys" were tackling the sky trails leading to the Yukon.

"Are we busy?" Captain Bell echoed an idle spectator who had dropped round to see what was doing at the Blatchford Field. "Look," he grinned happily, "Here's a sample of what was going on today. At twenty past eight this morning, Leigh Brintnell left for Cameron Bay on Great Bear Lake. Ten minutes later Grant McConachie and Ted Field took off in two machines with gold prospectors, bound for the Yukon by way of Prince George."

Captain Jimmy paused for breath.

"Then, not long after that, Pilot MacPhee of Consolidated Mining and Smelting arrived from Creston and presently was off again for the same destination. Then, after lunch, Pilot Jewitt of Consolidated came in from Creston. Later this afternoon Wop May arrived from the north with five passengers . . ."

As well as the bustling operations of these larger concerns, there were from time to time hurried plans shaped by others anxious to share in the great new mining boom. Established locally but briefly was the Great Bear Lake Airways Company, to which Prince and Princess Galitzine also lent their support.

Winging all the way from eastern Canada came Pilot Lewis Leigh, a later winner of the McKee Trophy, and now flying a Fokker for the Explorers' Air Transport. And from Saint John, New Brunswick, Harry Hayter hustled his own Curtiss Robin. Harry, too, had already had a varied career. He had flown extensively in eastern Canada, and like Jack Caldwell, had piloted a plane as seal spotter for the fishing fleet off the Magdalen Islands. Now he formed his own company, Airportation Limited, to ply between McMurray and Great Bear Lake.

Paying due heed to the manner in which the air business was mushrooming at the frontier city on the North Saskatchewan, officialdom made a new move.

"In recognition of Edmonton as the air capital of western Canada," a report cited, "Inspector H. C. Ingram of the civil aviation branch has announced the removal of his office from Regina to Edmonton."

Purpose of the switch was "to bring him in closer touch with the Mackenzie River basin and Great Bear Lake services, as well as with the activities of the Edmonton Aero club, Canada's most active flying club."

In spite of often tremendous odds, by plane, boat and barge, traffic to and from the remote destinations in the Great Bear area continued to move. The story of water navigation and freighting in that region and in the Mackenzie basin generally was in itself a record of Herculean achievement. By the fall of 1933, equipment for a silver concentrating mill for the Eldorado Company was transported to the east shore of Great Bear, with planes and boats sharing the chore. Before the end of November, the silver "mill," located at Labine Point, began operation.

In that same month, there came out from Great Bear word of a boat crew's battle for survival, with aeroplanes risking the uncertainties of the in-between season to attempt their rescue.

Attempting to utilize to the full the short navigation season on the sub-Arctic sea, on October 21 the gasoline-fed boat *Speed* had left Fort Franklin outbound for Cameron Bay and towing a barge loaded with forty-five tons of freight. Presently ship and barge ran into a storm so terrific that the barge had to be cut loose.

"From that moment we were fighting for our lives," one of the seven crew-men on the barge afterward related.

At the height of the storm, waves hurled her fifty and sixty feet and she was in constant danger of being swamped or crushed on the rocks. Eventually she was blown right inshore, so solidly ice-coated in the near-zero temperature that dogs quartered on the deck had to be hacked free of the ice. Taking provisions and camp equipment, the men finally got safe ashore.

Worse still was the ordeal of those on the *Speed*. In the midst of the storm fire broke out in the engineroom and two men trapped there were burned to death. Before the ship vanished in smoke and

flames, the badly-burned captain, Vic Ingraham and his assistant, S. Currie, got away in a rubber lifeboat.

Ice-sheathed and half-frozen, without paddle or oar, they drifted through the night. Next morning they were blown up on a small island. They dragged themselves ashore and were presently able to cross the channel to the mainland, where they began an agonizing three-day search for survivors from the barge.

Meanwhile Harry Hayter and his Curtiss Robin were down at Cameron Bay. There, by October 31, ship and barge were still unreported, so Harry took off in search of them. Eleven days elapsed before he found the battered barge and the survivors' camp.

By this time a pair of the crew members had succeeded, after a six-day trek over 125 miles of rough and treacherous shore ice, in reaching Cameron Bay on foot. At once Pilot John Bythell and Dr. T. O. Byrne took off to the rescue. Arriving at a small frozen lake inshore from the camp, they found Hayter already there with his plane. He was awaiting the other survivors, who were carrying Ingraham out through bush and deep snow.

Dusk was already settling in, so one plane engine was kept running to guide the little party to the rendezvous. Soon all were loaded aboard and within twenty-five minutes both planes had covered the 80-mile run back to Cameron Bay. In spite of the twilight, they got down safely.

Next day, Pilot Bythell began the next lap of the rescue. Because of insufficient ice in the south, he headed north with Ingraham. At Fort Norman he had to wait out fog. Eventually, he was able to whisk his patient to hospital at Aklavik. There, to save the hardy trader's life, Dr. Urquhart had to amputate both his feet and parts of both hands.

Such accomplishments of the aeroplane were perhaps becoming so much routine to the pilots. But even many of the stay-at-homes of the city and district, that obviously now extended right to the Arctic, were delighted with the announcement of the winner of the McKee trophy for 1933. It was awarded to the dauntless Walter Gilbert, who for his share in the Burwash expedition had also been honoured with a fellowship in the Royal Geographic Society.

During that next winter, Pilot Gilbert flew a giant all-metal Junkers freighter. He continued to beat his own previous records, piling up a total in winter flights of over 40,000 miles traversed.

Another pilot, Captain Elmer Fullerton, whose name was also linked with historic northern sorties, was the next winner of the McKee trophy. Edmonton's residents remembered those anxious days back in 1921 when "Fullie," who had meanwhile done much outstanding work with the R.C.A.F., had piloted one of Imperial Oil's Junkers to the Peace River and eventually to Norman Wells and back. They remembered, too, that he had next flown on the Alaskan coast on one of Amundsen's ill-fated tries to reach the North Pole.

Already, within a decade, the changes wrought were so amazing that it was difficult for many a solid ground-hugging citizen to comprehend fully their significance.

"Some developments in aviation," aptly summed up Superintendent Punch, "almost require a Jules Verne to imagine them."

One such development that in the vast district it spanned was difficult of full comprehension, was the spreading network of air-mail services.

From the frontier centre at Edmonton, gradually the aeroplanes and the postal officials were threading out to more and more posts, some not too far distant but inaccessible by rail, and others almost brushing the Arctic circle. Since that day late in 1929 when Wop May and Idris Glyn-Roberts had delivered the first winter mail to Aklavik, new postal paths had been blazed in several directions.

On February 2, 1931, Wop May and Inspector Hale carried the first mail to Fort Vermilion on the Peace. Twenty-two days later Wop appeared at Athabasca with that town's first airborne mail.

So often had the spotlight shone on the Great Bear area that by the end of 1932, when a post office opened on its east shore at Cameron Bay, the first flight covers reached a staggering total of 20,000. Pilots Hollick-Kenyon and Walter Gilbert shared the honour of lifting this gigantic pack to the little trading-store post office operated by Gerald Murphy.

A like number of first flight covers was borne to the Camsell River when another postal trail was pioneered to this little post in the south-east Bear Lake region.

There was next to follow another great day to be hailed by philatelists the world over, a great day when the first winter mail was to be delivered to a tiny settlement right on the shore of the Arctic Ocean.

## 1934-1937

AGAIN, AS WHEN EARLY in 1929 Punch Dickins ventured north with first consignments of air mail from the city, the demon winter weather played to the limit its favourite role of bad actor.

This new service, from Cameron Bay on Great Bear Lake, to Coppermine on the polar sea, was to be instituted by Walter Gilbert in the great freight-carrying Junkers.

His load of mail included some 8,200 first flight covers and belated Christmas presents that jammed every available inch of space within the machine. With him travelled, as well as Mechanic Parmenter, the postal superintendent Major Walter Hale, who was to open the new polar sea post office.

Wind, blizzard and fog did their utmost to delay and thwart the flight. It was, assessed Pilot Gilbert, "the worst flying weather since the air-mail service began in the north."

At last there came, to the Great Bear Lake area, a clear calm day. Except for the ground fog resulting from the fifty-five below zero temperature, there was good visibility. From Echo Bay's ice-field, on the east shore, the Junkers roared off northeast.

Below them on Hunter Bay, like Echo the site of pitchblende finds, grey-black dots of herds of caribou enlivened the winter scenery. Dwarfed trees and shrubs also made pinpoints of dark until the plane zoomed over the Coppermine mountains. Now they were crossing an enormous snowswept plain, apparently devoid of life. Winding athwart it, the Coppermine River made an indisputable landmark leading them at last to the post at its mouth.

Several times Pilot Gilbert circled, searching for the smoothest patch of shore ice on which to descend. Soon he was safely down and the little knot of watching whites and Eskimos rushed forward to meet the plane. The historic date was January 28, 1934.

Within minutes, willing hands were unloading the bulging bags.

Next, Major Hale swore in as postmaster Rev. J. Morris of the Anglican mission, and the arduous job of stamping and sorting began.

This new office, the first in the world right on the Arctic Ocean, was to serve an area reaching even farther toward the Pole. It was to extend along a thousand miles of coastline from Pearce Point on the west to King William Land on the east and three hundred miles north over the sea and ice to Walker Bay on Victoria Island. To meet the mail "ship," traders had arrived by dog-team from points hundreds of miles away.

Then Postmaster Morris handed out the first air-mail letter to be delivered on this Arctic shore. Its recipient was a man to become celebrated for his prowess in the polar regions, Sergeant H. A. Larsen, who was in charge of the R.C.M.P. boat, the *St. Roch*.

Formerly the mail had arrived in summer by boat through Bering Strait, in winter by police patrol dog-team from Herschel Island, a thousand miles to the west. Usually it was from six to eight months stale. Now the excited inhabitants knew the joy of receiving letters written in Edmonton twelve days before.

To Father D. L. Helganon of the Roman Catholic mission came the taste of another fresh contact with the "outside." Major Hale presented him with six rosy apples, the gift of Father Le Triste of McMurray.

To make sure the prize entrusted to him travelled safely through temperatures sometimes as much as 67° below zero, each night during the trip the flying postmaster tucked the apples into his own sleeping bag.

"*Merci, merci,*" repeated gratefully the priest, who had come formerly from Normandy in France and who had not tasted a fresh apple in two years.

Soon the Eskimos were building a protecting house of snow blocks over the big nose of the Junkers so that Lew Parmenter could check the engine in some comfort before the return was attempted.

For Major Hale there was time presently to pay a few courtesy calls on the inhabitants of his newest postal centre. Here, in this land of the Innuits, speedily he got more than a superficial view of how he was telescoping time from the air age back to the stone age. Afterwards, at home in Edmonton again, he described his first visit to an igloo that day in Coppermine.

"After crawling on my hands and knees through a tunnel into the



ice house, one Eskimo insisted that I join them in their afternoon meal. To my horror they handed out thick slices of frozen raw salmon with the insides still intact."

In honour of the occasion and the distinguished guests, that night a celebration and dance was held, with Eskimos flocking in from the neighbouring sealing-grounds to join in the fun.

Later that year, philatelists shared afresh the gratification of this postal pioneering. Soaring above the blue waters of Lake Athabasca, a Canadian Airways aeroplane whipped across it to open, on behalf of the Edmonton postal district, a new office at Fond du Lac, at the lake's eastern tip. In its fuselage were stuffed 10,000 first flight covers.

"The post office has helped to open up the north," proudly summed up the "flying superintendent," Major Hale.

Before that first contract let in 1929 to Commercial Airways, he added, "only carrier by dog-team in winter and one boat delivery in summer reached the farthest posts on the Mackenzie to Aklavik. Since that first aerial service not one item has been stolen, burned or lost."

Seldom, either, round about the Blatchford Field did watchers, always on the alert for excitement, know the taste of accident. Except for one fateful day.

So many heart-stopping stunts had been performed since the little Stinson appeared at the Exhibition of 1916, so many takeoffs and landings within the city had been safely executed, that when a plane was in serious trouble it was more of a dream than reality.

It was Victoria Day, 1934, and the Northern Alberta and Edmonton Aero club was just concluding a successful air show. A proud green and gold Fokker belonging to Mackenzie Air Services stood on the edge of the field "warming up" after an overhaul at the airport. It was a huge monoplane, one of the largest to fly in the north and capable of carrying ten passengers.

The programme of stunting, trick-flying and parachute dropping sponsored by the club was about ended. Pilot Matt Berry, who a couple of months previously had earned headlines with a first winter flight to Gjoa Haven for a cargo of furs and who had been unreported

for a fortnight after ski damage at isolated Cambridge Bay, now decided to take the Fokker up for a testing.

"Come on up, Jimmy," he called to Port-master Bell.

"I think I will, Matt," Jimmy replied in acceptance.

Mechanic Fred Hodgins shared the cockpit with Berry and Captain Jimmy climbed into the roomy passenger cabin. As the thinning crowd watched, the smart machine taxied down field and then swung round to face the hangar, ready to take off into the wind.

Near the centre of the field, the Fokker rose steadily for about ten or twelve feet. Suddenly, tail down, the great plane appeared to stall. Stupefied, the crowd watched the huge tail, then the left wheel, crash back to earth. The left wing crumpled, the tail shot up and then down again, severing the fuselage. Suddenly the whole machine was swallowed up in smoke and flame.

After one dumbfounded moment, the nearest spectators rushed up to help Captain Jimmy and Pilot Berry, who had been thrown clear. Mechanic Hodgins, whose father, Bob Hodgins, was also an air engineer with Mackenzie Air Services, was caught in the flaming wreckage.

Heedless of the fire, a young man with a private pilot's license, Nick Luciw, set about freeing him and dragging him from the flames. In hospital, Jimmy Bell and Matt Berry presently recovered from their painful injuries. But the young mechanic failed to rally.

That was the first fatal accident to mar the unblemished record round about the field.

Not too long afterward there soared down from out of the southern sky an old friend who had miraculously escaped a mishap of his own. It was Captain Ross Hoyt, who in 1929 in his speedy Curtiss Hawk had attempted that plucky solo to Alaska and back.

This time he and his associate, Captain E. B. Bobzien, were flying Douglas observation planes of the United States Air Force and they formed an advance guard for a new-old kind of expedition through the city, an aerial tour to Alaska. This was to be a great flight of ten huge Martin bombers under the charge of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry H. Arnold of the American Air Corps.

Quickly Hoyt and Bobzien lifted away again from the Blatchford Field, bound for Alaska as they fulfilled advance duties for the aerial armada to follow. Within days the dazzling flight arrived, to

be admired by many thousands of the city's residents as they manoeuvred down upon their air harbour, and to be craned at with wondering awe by still more thousands as presently they soared above the crowds enjoying themselves at the summer fair.

Again, while citizens thought back to General Mitchell's expedition of years before and to the persevering and plucky Captain Streett and his crews, Colonel Arnold repeated a message with an old-time refrain.

"First," he said, "we are messengers of good will. Secondly, we want to test the feasibility of taking a tactical flying squadron from the United States proper to Alaska territory. We are to make an aerial survey with the idea of establishing a base in Alaska for our fighting forces."

Soon their new Edmonton friends were pleased to hear that the triumphant tour had been safely completed, having returned to the United States by way of Seattle. Still more pleased were they to welcome again at the Blatchford Field that intrepid Captain Hoyt.

"Did you remember your crack-up last time as you returned now over the mountains to Edmonton?" he was asked.

"Yes. I certainly won't ever forget it. I spotted the exact place at Valemount where I cracked up. I'm sure glad they've given me a second chance at an Alaska flight."

Happily, then, the brisk flyer and his companions winged away to their homeland in the south.

Before the year was out, Mackenzie Air Services, too, had recovered from the loss of its plane and was on the march again. That next winter, the company added to its fleet a brand new green and gold Bellanca, the largest swiftest machine yet to cleave the sub-Arctic skies.

On one of its first sorties into the north, within three and a half days Leigh Brintnell piloted it from the city to Great Bear Lake and back to McMurray. Its freight load out on the 2000-mile "run" was two tons of pitchblende concentrate from the Eldorado Gold Mines Company development.

Within three weeks, this 730 horse-power titan of the skies had moved twenty tons of freight between the lakehead at McMurray and Cameron Bay on Great Bear. The "in" loads comprised mining

supplies and the two-ton "out" loads were the heavy chunks of radium ore. Each round-trip distance looped over 1800 miles.

With such a humming business schedule, the hustling manager of the company presently repaid in full his indebtedness to Anthony Fokker. Not a word of commendation, no expression of surprise or pleasure, did he receive from the great Flying Dutchman, who had "gambled" to stake a little aeroplane company.

Later, there came a day when Leigh Brintnell had occasion to be in Britain. By this time Fokker had reestablished himself in his homeland in Holland. Leigh got in touch with him by telephone. Fokker, delighted to renew his friendship with the Canadian, whisked across the Channel by plane and took him back to his home in Amsterdam for a brief visit. Still there was no mention of the loan or of its repayment. Again the conversation ranged rapidly over many subjects. Finally, Leigh's curiosity could stand it no longer. He himself broached the subject.

"About that loan, you've never told me if you were surprised that I paid you back."

"Oh," was the quick retort, "I knew you'd do it."

With that, the wizard mind leapt onward again to another topic of conversation.

By now, Leigh Brintnell's neighbours had accepted the fact that when he stepped briskly over his Edmonton doorstep in the morning, by nightfall he was probably "stepping" almost over the Arctic Circle in the vicinity of the far north mining camps.

"They told us," he said, "that without the aeroplane Great Bear could never have been developed."

By the summer of 1935, his chief pilot, Stan McMillan, had flung a new air loop away into the northwest. Leaving Edmonton with freight for several points, en route he stopped at Fort Rae, Great Bear and Fort Norman.

Then he jumped over the mountains to Whitehorse, thereby establishing, by way of the Mackenzie Valley, the first commercial link with the Pacific Alaskan Air Lines.

Next, from Fort St. John, on the British Columbia side of the Peace River block, he completed his trip by skipping back down to Edmonton. Within six days, he had described an aerial ellipse with a circumference of 5000 miles.

By the next year, Mackenzie Air Services, the company whose planes were reputed to be never on the ground except to take on or put off more pay loads, had enlarged its fleet to five machines.

Added to its personnel of hard-working pilots were Bob Randall, who was born and trained at Saskatoon, and North Sawle, a native of Athabasca who learned his flying from the city's Captain Burbidge, and who on graduating won the coveted shield for proficiency.

By now that other locally trained young man, Grant McConachie, had merged his love of flying and his determination to succeed on a definite sky pathway into the northwest. With the experience born of those first failures, he persevered.

He persuaded friends to loan more capital, acquired a faithful partner in Barney Phillips, Sr., of Edmonton, got hold of a couple more second-hand Fokkers and reshaped his Independent Airways into the United Air Transport. That next winter he and hardy Kubicek and Field moved a million pounds of fish over a largely uninhabited area through the winter's worst vagaries of wind and snow and fog.

In 1935, he pulled another "boner." So acquaintances believed—at first. For the bargain price of \$2,500, he bought the biggest white elephant in the whole of Canada. This was a celebrated Ford tri-motor, that had once been valued at \$50,000.

A huge all-metal monoplane, this leviathan had led a life as crammed with adventure as that of its new owner. For the previous three seasons, it had been carrying sightseers over Niagara Falls. Prior to that, it had flown Lindbergh's mother from Mexico City to New York to meet her son following his long North America-South America flight.

And before that, it had participated in the rescue of the three men forced down on lonely Greenly Island off the south tip of Labrador after they had made a first westward crossing of the Atlantic. The men, Captain James Fitzmaurice, Baron Gunther von Huenefeld and Captain Hermann Koehl, were finally air-lifted to the mainland by the well-known Canadian pilots, "Duke" Schiller and Romeo Vachon.

Now as the only commercial tri-motor in Canada, and the biggest carrier west of Winnipeg, the adventuring giant took to fish-hauling.

With it, the twenty-six-year-old "flying fish-packer," Grant McConachie, had soon transported a million pounds of northern Alberta fish to the rail lines.

This hauling of millions of pounds of fish was only one phase of the prodigious feats Grant and his men of United Air Transport chalked to their credit. Becoming more and more widely known as the young man who wouldn't be licked, and who in one year flew seventeen mercy flights, before 1935 was out he became also "the man who moved a town."

Tiny Two Brothers Lake was a remote community midway between Prince Rupert and the northern British Columbia boundary that wanted to re-establish itself on a new site near a more promising mining region. This site was not too distant as the crow flies but it was on an inaccessible lake-shore on the other side of a range of mountains with peaks thrusting 8000 feet into the sky.

Grant and his United Air Transport undertook the mass move. Over the mountain wilderness they lifted the whole village and set it down complete in the new site, ninety human beings, their cattle and horses, a tractor, mining machinery, a sawmill, an electric-light plant, and coal and hay and oats and every conceivable human need.

Significant in the light of world-shaking events soon to follow, this United Air Transport was for some time the only company serving the treacherous mountain-ringed areas of northern British Columbia.

In this period the flying-enthusiast head of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Major-General Sir James H. MacBrien, made a mammoth aerial inspection tour of "mountie" posts which logged 11,000 miles and which was believed to be to date the longest single air journey in the Dominion.

In the course of this marathon, Sir James took a close look as he flew over the sky-pathway used by United Air Transport.

"Undoubtedly this route," he predicted, "will be flown frequently in the future. It is one of the key routes from the United States and Canada to the Far East."

For his trail-blazing company, Grant insisted upon not only skill and care but rigid observation of regulations. Pointing the way himself, he became the first Edmontonian to fulfill the difficult qualifications for, and thereby to win, a transport pilot's license.



To earn this "ticket" the requirements included rigid commercial flying know-how, ability in night and blind flying and radio beam flying. As well, the young head of the company was also the first local pilot to win the blind flying license issued by the department of civil aviation.

In spite of the utmost caution, this manoeuvring of second-hand machines over the most taxing type of terrain often involved the men of United Air Transport in all kinds of predicaments and a series of crashes. Still they maintained, for their company, a proud record. Surprisingly enough, it was, "Not one passenger injured or killed."

Maintaining its own trail-blazing record, the Edmonton postal district arranged now for another extension of its air service. Goldfields, on the northern shore of Lake Athabasca, was sharing with the Great Bear area all the excitement of a prospecting rush and merited a post office of its own.

To it, on August 29, 1935, Pilot Wop May arrived with its first airmail, a whopping load of 7000 first flight covers as well as all the regular mail.

For their first pair of McKee Trophy winners and pioneering mail-carriers, the people of the Edmonton area this year thrilled with pride as a new honour was bestowed upon them.

In recognition of their outstanding services, Wilfred Reid May, D.F.C., and Clennell H. Dickins, D.F.C., "pioneers of the far north airways," were awarded the Order of the British Empire.

Amidst the shower of congratulations, instances of their prowess were being quoted on every hand.

"Wop is undoubtedly the best air-mail pilot in the country," beamed the "flying superintendent," Major Hale.

Of the achievements of Punch Dickins, his comrade-pilot, Walter Gilbert, recalled that in 1929, "in the first year of operation in the Mackenzie area, more than 1000 hours were logged by Punch, a record which has never since been equalled in northern commercial flying."

By this period in the mid-thirties, residents in the area noted that more and more frequently were all the airmen flying within the territory being called upon to answer all kinds of calls for help. They might read the headline, "Flyer makes perilous hop to sick man," and

they looked beneath to find an account of how Pilot Archie McMullen had hopped off into some inaccessible spot to bring an ill patient to hospital.

Or they noted the announcement, "Pilot Ernie Kubicek completes hazardous mercy flight through sub-zero storm," or "Pilot Marlowe Kennedy of Mackenzie Air Services in hectic flight brings insane man to hospital."

Or it might be "Airman races spring thaw on mercy hop," telling of a dash made by Grant McConachie.

Beneath the announcement, "Makes Mercy Trip on Christmas Day," on another occasion, a news story told of a beyond-the-call-of-duty trip taken by Pilot Art Rankin. Again, in the course of one of the longest of these "mercy" flights, Rankin, who was a member of the first Edmonton class to receive a pilot's license and who twice won the *Journal* cup for flying proficiency, worked all one night on his plane before he was able to complete a 3000-mile rescue snatch.

In such fashion did all the pilots employed by the three hustling companies hold themselves constantly in readiness to answer pleas for aid in the frontier land that now reached from the Alberta capital to the shores of the Arctic.

When, late in 1935, Punch Dickins was transferred to Winnipeg as superintendent of western operations of Canadian Airways, and Wop May followed him as superintendent out of Edmonton, Conway Farrell in turn became chief pilot in the Mackenzie district.

Soon Con, the flyer who had blazed the prairie air-mail paths, was to earn a special place for himself in the hearts of northerners as he sped the mail from McMurray to posts all the way to Aklavik. The "Santa Claus of the North," they called him.

Often Pilot Farrell had to "sit down" and wait for the weather to break. Often, like bush pilots everywhere, he hurried to help those in trouble.

To relieve the food problems of the Eskimo people, the government at Ottawa commissioned the Laplander, Andrew Bahr, to bring a herd of reindeer all the way across the top of Alaska and the Yukon into the central Canadian Arctic.

While the continent watched the stupendous efforts of the men on the five-year long trek, all kinds of ill-luck began to dog them. Finally as they neared the Mackenzie delta, a shrieking blizzard surrounded them and their dwindled herd of reindeer stampeded. Somehow, too, the herders lost all their supplies.

They made their way to Shingle Point on the Arctic coast, the site of a former Anglican mission. Unhappily, there, too, no food was to be found. At last, an Eskimo was dispatched to Aklavik, one hundred miles distant, with an appeal for help.

At the latter post, Pilot Farrell had just loaded up his plane with the southbound mail when Dr. Urquhart hailed him.

"I've got a job for you, Con. I want you to go out and find Andy Bahr. He's in a bad way, over in the Shingle Point area."

"What!" protested Con. "What the—! Find Bahr? That'd be impossible." The Shingle Point area was a low huge expanse beyond the delta completely lacking in distinctive landmark features. "That'd be like looking for a needle in a haystack!"

In spite of the bad weather, Con reloaded his plane with 1500 pounds of supplies and raced off northwest. Successfully he located Shingle Point and the stranded herders.

"We'd just about given up hope," were the gratifying words he heard when he got safely down on the ice.

Next he made a quick search of the mainland seeking the runaway reindeer. No trace could he find of them.

Many were the tales of the exploits of this pilot whose name so quickly became a legend in the lonely posts dotting the Mackenzie valley and the Arctic coast from Cambridge Bay to Aklavik.

Particularly they remembered one occasion when, with Christmas nearing and every settlement longing for mail and parcels from outside, he pushed on through fog and storm from post to post, reaching Aklavik with the Yule mail and one day to spare before Christmas. "All," testified a northern resident, J. H. Bilton, writing afterward in the *Ottawa Journal*, "would have risen and toasted his health for such a feat."

He was, added Mr. Bilton admiringly, "a ray of sunshine to the lonely settlements. After months of isolation, one would hear the distant drone of a plane. Emerging from frame or log dwellings, excited and bounding with anticipation, people would race down to the treacherous ice-coated river. There they would re-mark with spruce boughs the makeshift runway and wait for him to land.

"Out of the haze a plane would come into view. It would proceed to circle us standing out there on the ice. Having surveyed the situation and made a couple of turns, Con would guide his monster of the sky, with its broad skis dangling beneath the huge fuselage, down to a skilful landing. From a bundle of fur out would pop the

head of the pilot. 'Hello, you Arctic wolves, what's biting you?' It was Farrell, that human dynamo, with his gay unassuming walk, his witty tongue.

"First of all he would check out the mail for the settlement, then alight to greet us all with a handshake, his face covered with that familiar smile peculiar to Con. We would pitch in and make the plane safe for the night. The mechanic would hurry to drain the oil while it was warm and cover the engine with the canvas hood. Thirsting for news, the majority would gather that evening wherever Con was staying to hear all the latest news of outside and what others were doing along the river. Always, with his cheery smile, he called on every household. Truly he was the Santa Claus of the North. Truly he was a man with the heart and courage of a lion."

Which testimony reminded others of the time when Pilot Farrell had to tackle a beast angry as a lion while flying his plane.

He had undertaken to ferry 109 snarling husky dogs to trappers in the wild country north and east of Fort Reliance. One of the animals freed himself from his restraining chain and started a free-for-all fight with the other dogs in the back of the aircraft. The trapper-owner of the dogs, who was sitting with Con in the cockpit, decided to take a hand in the fight. He also went to the back of the plane and laid into the beasts with a small metal ladder.

All this additional weight in the tail-end began to affect vitally the fore and aft equilibrium of the machine. Pilot Con had to fight the plane down to an emergency landing on water. For the next few minutes he and the trapper were extremely busy. Precariously, they got down safely, quickly restored order and resumed their journey.

Then there came that day when the American who had shown Edmonton a new meaning for the word courage brought his plane down on the flat river channel at Aklavik. Wiley Post, with Will Rogers, was attempting to test another new trail across the top of the North American continent. Flying this time a Lockheed Orion, a single-engined monoplane, he came down at the delta post, there to be met by Con Farrell.

Together they spent the evening, rich with flying reminiscence. Next morning Wiley and Will set off toward the western hills on their last reconnaissance, their destination being Point Barrow in

Alaska. Pilot Farrell bade them good-bye and turned southward to clear the River mail to Edmonton.

Next day was flashed to the world the news that both Wiley Post and Will Rogers had been killed. Taking off from an Eskimo settlement on a small river near Point Barrow, the Orion had smacked tragically earthward again. The pictures that Con Farrell and his engineer, Frank Hartley, had taken during the memorable meeting at Aklavik were used with the news releases that announced the disaster throughout Canada and the United States.

Presently the pair of Canadians were themselves involved in mishap. Con had a cardinal rule for "bush" flying—if you lose yourself due to bad weather, land at first opportunity and wait for the weather to clear.

He was heading back to Fort Reliance after unloading a trapper and his supplies east of the Bache River in the Barren Lands. Snow storms of blizzard proportions began to blow up. Soon he lost what few landmarks were available and ran so low in fuel, "five gallons by measurement," that he was forced to land before the engine cut out.

When he failed to show up again at Fort Reliance, the mounted police at this station notified the Royal Canadian Signal Corps at Fort Resolution. Con, they knew, had with him what was a not-too-usual bit of apparatus in this era of flying, a two-way radio. So the Signal Corpsman alerted all other stations in the area to listen for word from him.

Meanwhile Con broadcast what he thought was his position and requested Matt Berry, who was down at Fort Rae, to come along and pick him up. Then the radio's battery gave out, and he was unable to make further broadcasts. He and Hartley sat back and waited, expecting to hear within a few hours the drone of Matt's plane.

At once Matt set forth to rescue the pair. He proceeded directly to the area where they were supposed to be. Not a trace could he find of them. Day after day, day after day, Matt persisted in the baffling search. The great lost Junkers was like another needle in a haystack in the vast unmarked region, pocked with thousands of myriad-shaped lakes, where the grounded pair waited.

Undoubtedly, Matt at last decided, they were not where they thought they were. In the area, landmarks present a baffling same-

ness and compasses are often unreliable. They just couldn't be where they thought they were.

Gradually he swung his plane farther and farther north and west above Great Slave Lake. On the eleventh day of searching, he spotted a glad sight.

On an island in the middle of Frye Lake, actually all of one hundred and fifty miles distant from the spot they had radioed as their location, Matt saw the downed plane and the two lonely figures.

"Where the . . . am I?" Con wanted to know as Matt taxied to a stop near them.

"You're here on Frye Lake." He pointed to a map that was looped and re-looped with dozens of fruitless circles.

Pilot Farrell was unconvinced.

"We couldn't be," he insisted.

"All right," urged Matt. "Go up and see for yourself."

Presently he *was* able to see for himself where he was.

"It made me sore having to report that I was lost," grinned the pilot who had made dozens of trips over the sketchily marked immensities of the north and its confusing samenesses and who had never before been lost. "I broke my own cardinal rule."

Seriously he added, "We could have lasted three more days."

There had been no sight on the island of game or fish for the stranded pair and they had subsisted on emergency rations of porridge, bacon and beans. All of these were highly seasoned with fly-tox, which had dribbled over them from a leaky container.

"But Matt Berry was a welcome visitor, you can bet, when he did arrive after the eleven days."

"All in the day's work," smiled the shy Matt, who was to rate front-page headlines across Canada twice the following year for life-saving rescues.

Since its beginning days shortly after World War One, the Canadian Air Force, as it was at first known, had been constantly enlarging its sphere of patrol and photographic duties. Until now in the middle thirties it had extended its work into many remote and little-known regions.

During the summer of 1936, six aeroplanes of the R.C.A.F. had been engaged in an ambitious programme of photographic surveying of the huge lake-dotted area between Fort Rae on the northwestern



arm of Great Slave Lake, Fort Reliance on the northeastern arm, and the Back River, lying away near the Arctic Circle.

One of the young pilots engaged in this work, Flight Lieutenant Sheldon Coleman, accompanied by Aircraftman J. A. Fortey, had paid a visit to Hunger Lake to take repair parts to a downed plane. On August 17, in their Fairchild seaplane, they had taken off again, bound for Fort Reliance, two hundred and forty miles below.

When they failed to turn up at their destination, it was at once obvious that, with bad storms in the area and with compasses unreliable, the pair must have become lost. The young men had no radio on their machine, so at first there appeared to be no clue at all as to where they had gone down.

At once a search was begun, a search that was at first greatly hampered by the shortage of fuel in this remote Barrens area. Both Canadian Airways and Mackenzie Air Services pilots turned to render assistance.

From Edmonton Pilot McMillan roared away in one of Leigh Brintnell's proudest acquisitions, a green and gold giant that would help to freight the much needed gasoline to Fort Reliance and from the Camsell portage to Fort Resolution. Bringing a Canadian Airways machine, Pilot Rudy Heuss also lent a hand in the arduous freighting of supplies for the searchers.

Presently a clue was found that raised high hopes of finding the pair alive. As it turned out, it was a clue by which the missing men almost signed their own death warrant. In an empty oil drum on a deserted lakeshore was found a scrawled message, "Fuel almost gone. Heading south."

Days and weeks passed and the annihilating northern winter was threatening. Still the searchers, scouring the countryside especially in the southerly areas where the pair were thought to have come down, failed to turn up even the tiniest further clue.

Eventually, Matt Berry, now flying for Canadian Airways, was called into the search. Matt had a theory. Supposing the men, completely confused by blinding storm and by an unreliable compass, flew westerly or even northwesterly instead of south? Supposing, too, they thought of the need for fuel to keep themselves warm in case they had to wait several days to be located? In that case, believed Matt, they would probably swing westward toward a timbered region.

Matt's theory was strengthened by the observation of a veteran trapper in the area. On the day the craft went missing, he had, he insisted, seen a plane flying in a northwesterly direction.

For six days Matt and his engineer, Frank Hartley, circled their search in this general direction. On the sixth they sighted what dozens of pairs of staring eyes, during the baffling thirty-day search, had longed to see. By the shore of lonely Point Lake crouched a small tent and a downed plane.

"I thought I recognized the country to the west," explained Flight Lieutenant Coleman. "So we swung away in that direction." This, of course, after leaving the note saying they would head south.

From another oil drum the young men had fashioned themselves a crude stove. Daily they kept busy dragging branches from the brush a couple of miles distant to fuel their fire. With native berries and ground squirrels, they eked out their meagre rations.

The long days passed and no sight did they see nor sound hear of the planes persistently searching for them. The night-time temperatures were dropping nearer and nearer to zero. At last they faced the fact that they were not going to be found alive. They wrote last messages to their loved ones and waited for death. Then came Matt Berry, an angel of mercy, racing down from the sky to what was to have been their solitary death-couch.

Within hours, headlines across Canada were shouting the glad news. Matt rushed the pair to an Edmonton hospital and soon they were fit as ever—this despite the report that, away down in the United States, an excited but somewhat confused radio announcer, relating the story of the rescue, told his listeners that during their ordeal all the young men had had to eat was "a few matt berries."

Rejoicing, representatives of the people of Edmonton gathered in the Macdonald Hotel and on their behalf Mayor Joe Clarke presented bronzed blue-eyed Matt with a scroll commemorating the rescue.

More publicity shy even than most of his reticent comrades of the sky, Matt had to be coaxed by Wop May to put in an appearance at the little ceremony. Modestly he shrugged it all off.

"The part I played was as nothing compared with the work done by the R.C.A.F. pilots."

Termed "the greatest air hunt in Canadian history," the long search rivalled in several features that for the MacAlpine party. Like that historic quest, it too taught many lessons.

Two days after Matt Berry and Frank Hartley spotted the luckless lads, a deep blanket of snow laid its annihilating shroud upon the whole region. By two days had the pair thus failed to keep their tryst with death.

In the dark days of December, Matt Berry was off again on a more definite and more difficult rescue snatch.

By way of Aklavik, word had come that Bishop Peter Falaize, three priests, a lay brother and an Eskimo guide were stranded and starving at Paulatuk mission, a point at the mouth of the Hornaday River on the Arctic shore fifty miles distant from Letty Harbour. Pilot Berry was asked to attempt a rescue.

Taking off from Aklavik on December 11th, Matt and his engineer, Rex Terpening, found themselves bucking a gale-force wind which engulfed the big Junkers in blinding snow-swirls. Through the winter twilight they groped forward. From time to time using a flashlight to check their instruments, they were able to maintain their bearings through the difficult 350-mile dash and locate the desolate little mission-house. The starving inhabitants were still alive.

"They were in pretty bad shape," Matt noted briefly afterward. "They'd been forced to abandon their boat and they'd travelled a good many miles along the coast on foot to reach the mission."

There, the priests found, to their great disappointment, that the expected cache on which they had counted had been plundered by polar bears.

"They were in a bad way," recalled Matt. "All they had to eat was a bit of caribou three years old."

Next day the flyers hurried off to another cache and succeeded in bringing back a life-saving 1500 pounds of food. Then the weather closed in and rescuers and rescued had to huddle within the shelter of the mission. After ten days the storm lifted and Matt attempted to whisk the whole party to Aklavik. Presently another blinding storm forced him down on a small lake. Seeking what shelter they could from the plane and a canvas covering, they spent the night there waiting out the blizzard.

At last, within the brief twilight of the next day, December 22nd, Pilot Berry flew them to Aklavik and to warmth and safety. His flight had established a new record, the farthest north so far in the depth of winter.

"All in the day's work," smiled the shy pilot, whose northward

career had begun more than eight years before with a first flight into Baker Lake for the N.A.M.E. and who had with Frank Baragar and others pioneered for that company right up into the remote Coppermine and Bathurst Inlet regions.

In Edmonton and throughout the northland there was great satisfaction in the announcement of the McKee Trophy winner for 1936. It was Matt Berry, the man now becoming known as the "king of the bush pilots".

Pilot Berry, summed a report, "knows the lonely unmarked trails of the far north as well as the Alberta farmer knows the contours of his own grain-fields or the Edmonton resident the outlines of his own backyard."

His notable skill in northern navigation was paralleled by Pilot Stan McMillan in a somewhat similar rescue achieved in the same forbidding Arctic area.

Word reached Cameron Bay on Great Bear's east shore that a small trading-ship bound for Tuktoyatuk was trapped in the ice at Letty Harbour. Pilot McMillan, with air engineer Bob Hodgins, set out to rescue the three men aboard, first coaching them by radio how to set out flares on the ice to guide the plane down.

The weather was bitterly cold, with the thermometer registering 40° below zero, and the short Arctic day permitted only four hours of daylight in which to find the stranded men.

Creeping along by contact flying, watching for landmarks over which they must pass, checking with their compass and allowing for variations due to the nearness of the magnetic pole area, they skimmed over the 350-mile waste of tundra and ice. They located the little ship and cautiously eased the plane down beside it. There were but fifteen minutes of daylight remaining.

A blizzard closed in. For four days plane and vessel were storm-bound on the icefield. On the fifth, the weather cleared. With the three crew-members from the boat and Mechanic Hodgins, Pilot McMillan lifted his machine away to Cameron Bay and safety.

"A remarkable feat of navigation," commented those who knew the hazards encountered and the problems overcome in the making of such a flight.

Soon the city that had become a headquarters for ships of the air fanning far out into, or returning from, the aerial unknown was to

know a share in a fresh accomplishment that would tie a link even nearer the pole. Again her citizens were to have another opportunity to brush shoulders with voyageurs attempting a bold new enterprise.

To Mrs. W. H. Owen, the city's "weather lady," who maintained the Dominion meteorological office near the city's Exhibition Grounds, came a surprise request.

"Hello," said a strange voice over the telephone, a voice that spoke with a pronounced "foreign" accent.

"This is the Russian embassy at Washington. Will you please send weather reports every three hours to the marine weather station at Seattle?"

The reports, the voice explained, were to aid a team of Russian aviators attempting to fly over the Pole from Moscow *en route* to San Francisco.

Two venturesome flights over the Pole, both reaching destinations in the western United States, were presently achieved. Then came word of a third and even more ambitious attempt.

Sigmund Levaneffsky, the Lindbergh of Russia, who had rescued globe-jumping Jimmy Mattern and who in 1935 had made a previous attempt to fly across the Pole, was coming to Edmonton. Flying a monster four-engined monoplane, Levaneffsky, with a crew of five, was to fly from Moscow across the Pole, thence to Fairbanks, to Edmonton and to a destination in the United States. His ambition was to set up a commercial route by way of the North Pole.

"We're ready to cooperate in every way," T. G. Stephen, inspector of civil aviation, assured officials.

Posing a considerable problem alone was the size of the flying leviathan. Its wing spread was reported to be one hundred and thirty-one feet. Portage Avenue, down which it would have to trundle, both for landing and take off, was only one hundred feet wide.

Hurriedly crews of men chopped away the bordering bush and shrubs lining the unused flanks of Portage's broad plane of concrete. The visiting giant, it was expected, would arrive some time during the night. So special strings of lights were strung in readiness.

To speed the visitors on their way, customs officials arrived to make the regulation inspections, and a report announced that members of the Soviet embassy staff in Washington were *en route* to the city to hail their conquering countrymen.

For the monster plane's thirsty engines, ten tons of the special gasoline required were hauled out in readiness. Again, as with the visit of Wiley Post and Gatty, with Post again and with Jimmy Mattern, details of city and mounted police were prepared to handle the excited crowds and again make sure that they did not, as with the Post and Gatty flight, overflow Portage and hinder the flyers.

Again, radio broadcasters and reporters stood by to notify a waiting world of their arrival in Canada. Meanwhile, to Major G. E. Genet, director of the Royal Canadian Signal Corps, came the positive and stirring news that the flight had begun.

"This is the Canadian legation in Washington," read the telegram. "We are informed that Levaneffsky, the Russian flyer, took off from Moscow at 8:13 a.m. today for a flight across the North Pole. Will you please instruct your operators at Fort Norman, Aklavik and Dawson to listen to radio communications from the Russian plane and to be ready to supply weather information."

Presently came a radioed message from the plane itself, relayed to the city.

"Everything is all right," assured the voice speaking from the polar silences.

Seventeen hours, forty-seven minutes after leaving Moscow, it added, they had crossed the polar icecap, flying four miles above it in the stratosphere.

With some two hundred miles of the 1480-mile stretch from the pole to Fairbanks traversed, the voice spoke again. One engine was in trouble and ice was forming. Still they were apparently making steady headway toward the Alaskan city.

Presently Fairbanks intercepted another message believed to have come from the plane. "No bearings, having trouble with wave band."

Edmonton held its breath, still ready for the great news from the Alaskan city that the visitors had touched down there and were again on their way. As the day wore into evening, reporters, photographers and officials stood by in worried readiness.

Slowly the hours passed. No further word crackled out of the polar seas. By midnight, it was obvious that something must be much amiss and waiting citizens reluctantly began straggling home to their beds.

Next morning, the waiting and watching were resumed. That day



and succeeding days dragged by. Still there was not a whisper of further communication from out of the forbidding polar Arctic.

Quickly an international search was organized. Helping to direct it from the North American continent was the famed Explorers Club of New York, of which Vilhjalmur Stefannson was president.

To the celebrated Australian polar explorer, Sir Hubert Wilkins, the Russian embassy at Washington sent a request. Would he take charge of the search from northern Canada?

Readily Sir Hubert agreed. For his crew in the searchplane, a twin-engined flying-boat to be supplied by Russia, he chose four Canadians. As chief pilot he selected "Bertie" Hollick-Kenyon, who had flown all over western Canada, in the far north, and with Lincoln Ellsworth in the Antarctic expedition of 1934. For this latter exploit, he had received the honorary title of Air Commodore.

Co-pilot was to be another celebrated sky pioneer, Al Cheesman of Port Arthur, the "flying alderman" who had soared out of Edmonton as early as 1929 with prospectors of the Northern Aerial Minerals Exploration Company and in the Antarctic with Sir Hubert. Also agreeing to fly with the search plane were Gerald Brown, air engineer and Ray Booth, the radio operator.

While arrangements for this search expedition were getting under-way and while northern icebreakers and aeroplanes from Europe and Asia were beginning to comb the Arctic regions, to Leigh Brintnell in Edmonton came a call from the Russian embassy. "Would he send a man to help?"

Forthwith Pilot Bob Randall of Mackenzie Air Services, who had previously won an honorary membership in the Canadian Geographic Society for pilot services in Yukon expeditions, was dispatched from Herschel Island. Pilot Randall was thus the first Canadian to participate in the search.

A series of weather disturbances, with wind and rain, gripped the bleak wastes where the search was concentrated. Shortage of fuel was another stupendous handicap, and two pilots of Canadian Airways, Art Rankin and Paul Davoud, began ferrying gasoline to Aklavik.

"What do you think of their chances?" local residents queried Captain "Pat" Reid, who in the winter of 1929-1930 had directed the search off the Alaskan coast for Pilot Ben Eielson.

"Most of the Arctic islands are impossible to land on," Captain

Reid shook his head. "They couldn't walk out on the ice. They'd be very lucky if they managed to come down on a suitable island."

Pilot Brintnell, who only the week before the Levaneffsky flight, had toured out from Coppermine over a stretch of the Arctic with the governor-general, Lord Tweedsmuir, agreed with Captain Reid.

To come down anywhere near the shore, he said, would be "very risky. There are chunks of ice as big as houses. Farther out, they might find smooth ice."

Before the first week of waiting was over, Edmonton's radio station CJCA, that had beamed the magic of its waves to helping Wop May and Vic Horner in their mercy flight to Fort Vermilion in 1929, now tried to lend a hand to the missing men.

With the aid of the linguist, Professor Avenir Nizoff, in their late Saturday night "Hello the North" programme, they broadcast messages of comfort in the Russian tongue.

"Hello, hello, to Sigmund Levaneffsky," the messages began, "aeroplanes, ice-breakers are searching for you."

Perhaps the lost aviators, down somewhere on the inaccessible icepans, might hear the words and renew their hope for help to reach them.

In a glad chance at reciprocating the kindness of a fellow-aviator, Pilot Jimmy Mattern hastened to Fairbanks to join the searchers. More fuel was being hurried to Aklavik by Pilot North Sawle of Canadian Airways and from there Pilot Rudy Heuss of the same firm ferried it away on to Banks Island and to cache points along the Arctic shores.

Then came the in-between season when the search had temporarily to be suspended. Not a trace of the huge monoplane and the six men had been yet discovered.

Anxious enquirers sought out Pilot Randall, who was back in the city during the enforced "tie-up season." His six weeks' searching, in a Fairchild monoplane, had taken him over the sea water and ice from Herschel Island to Point Barrow.

"It's too early to give up hope," he insisted. So far, poor visibility over the polar wastes, he said, had greatly hampered the search.

By mid-November Sir Hubert, too, was in Edmonton, preparing for the second lap of the search. This time his pilots, Hollick-Kenyon and Cheesman, flew a different machine, a twin-engined silver mono-

plane that Aviator Dick Merrill had used in a flight from New York to London. It had a cruising speed of 200 miles an hour, a gas-carrying capacity of 1500 gallons and a nonstop length of flight of 5500 miles.

Sir Hubert hoped to make use to the full of the periods of bright Arctic moonlight to resume the hunt.

"I am interested in the search," he said simply, "not from any interest in the politics of the country the flyers belong to, but because they themselves set out on a brave adventure that may mean much in scientific world development."

Full of hope inspired by the competence of the new machine and the competence and courage of the crew, Edmonton inhabitants watched soberly as the shining plane lifted away to the north and they thought long thoughts about how their frontier lands had shrunk in those brief seventeen years since Captain Streett and his men had set off for Alaska.

Homing on the *Winnie Mae*, in 1931 Wiley Post had handed Jimmy Bell a silver dollar. It had travelled with him nearly 15,000 miles in eight days. Now, as a good-luck token, before Sir Hubert's party winged away, Jimmy passed it on to Pilot Hollick-Kenyon.

"To see how far a dollar can go," he grinned.

Despite the charm, the twin-engined Lockheed was soon forced back by fog. On a later try, it was successful in pushing forward on the first lap of its long and dangerous mission.

Presently, the slick monoplane developed engine trouble. To Leigh Brintnell, who had now organized an Aircraft Repair plant in the city, came a fresh request from the Soviet legation.

"Would his Aircraft Repair replace Sir Hubert's machine with a new engine and a new propeller?"

Again Sir Hubert put down at the Blatchford Field, this time in a Mackenzie Air Services plane piloted by Archie McMullen.

Eight days later, with the new engine and the new propeller, Archie was hustling him north again and the search resumed.

Still, as the weeks of winter darkness sped by, no further clue was discovered. At last, in March, Russian authorities notified Sir Hubert that the search would end.

Sir Hubert, arriving once more in town, said, "I have received word by radio from the Soviet government that the search for the flyers from the Alaska and Canadian coasts is now finished. It is

still possible that, if the six men landed without injury, they might have walked over the ice to the Canadian islands in the Arctic sea.

"Soviet officials, learning of the early spring thaw at Edmonton, decided it would not be wise to delay our stay in the Arctic any longer, in case we would have difficulty in returning to Edmonton with skis."

Levaneffsky's daring flight and the long hazardous search had, as with Franklin's tragedy, brought great accomplishment. Just as, pointed out the Arctic explorer Stefansson, "the long search for Franklin's party brought a wealth of new knowledge."

With his Canadian crew, Sir Hubert had flown 29,000 miles over the polar areas. Twice they had circled to within two hundred miles of the Pole itself.

Of his share in that guiding of planes over 29,000 miles of polar water and ice, Pilot Hollick-Kenyon, who had been himself lost in the Antarctic for fifty-five days, passed it off with the comment, "Just routine flying."

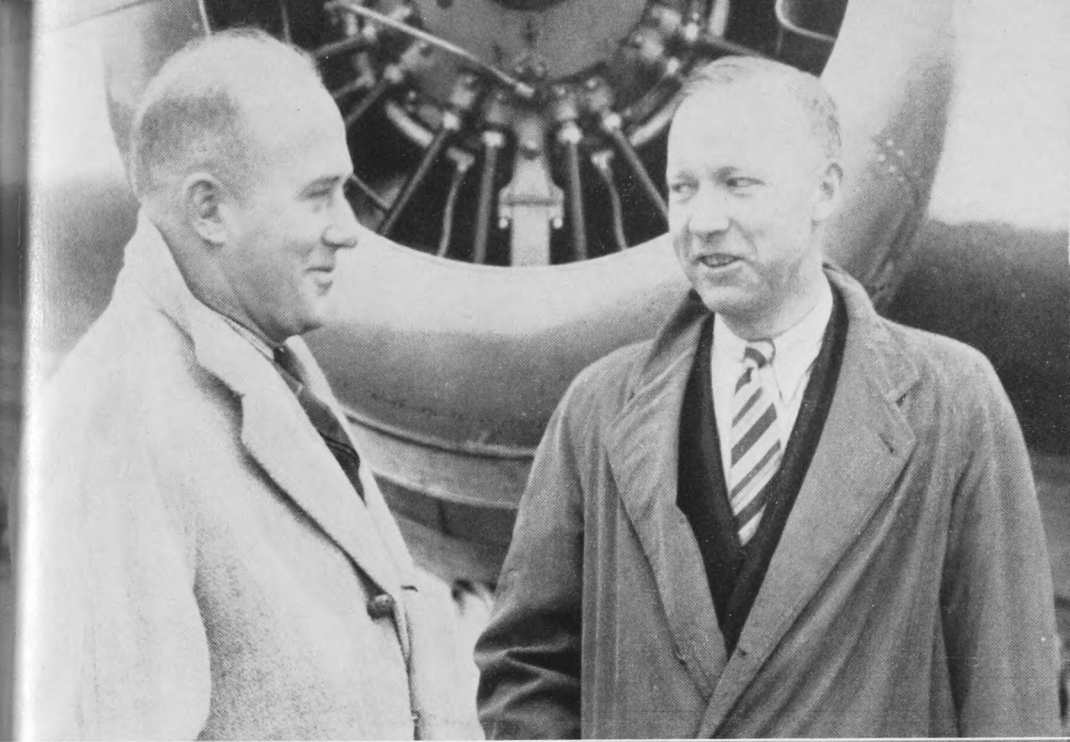
Remembering the fate of Amundsen who had as gallantly risked and lost his life in a polar area search, knowingly citizens shook their heads.

The failure of Levaneffsky, added Commodore Hollick-Kenyon, "was a glorious one." The long search made known "many new facts about the polar regions."

And this cooperation from many countries in an attempt to rescue six men was, he concluded, "a demonstration of the human spirit."

Edmontonians agreed. Like Franklin and all his men, like Amundsen and his companions, the guests they had so eagerly waited to welcome had been swallowed forever by the Arctic leviathan that sprawled across the top of their world.

And even as in after years, they reminisced about that significant night they waited for Levaneffsky and his wonder plane, many home-hugging citizens were conscious that once more their city lay in the path of destiny, that once more they had rubbed shoulders with history. Too soon afterward they found that aerial path of destiny crowded past all belief. Too soon history took up residence right in their midst.



Pilots H. Hollick-Kenyon (*left*) and Wop May (*right*) exchange smiles at Edmonton's airport.

CPA President, G. W. G. McConachie.

Clennell ("Punch") Dickins.





Premier Aberhart of Alberta with officials and pilots standing before a new TCA plane in Edmonton, April, 1939. *Left to right:* Captain Jimmy Bell, Mert Wales (*behind*), Con Farrell, Rudy Heuss, Wop May, Rev. Fr. Ehman, Aviation inspector T. G. Stephens, Premier Aberhart, Harry Hayter, a TCA engineer, Ernie Kubicek, Asst. insp. Ken Saunders, Sheldon Luck, Instructor Al Kennedy.

View showing typical wartime congestion at Blatchford Field, taken a few days after the Japanese jumped to Dutch Harbour.



## 1937-1938

"NORTH LIES THE DOORSTEP to Asia," dreamed Grant McConachie, busy with a thousand plans to build up his company, now in 1937 become incorporated as Yukon Southern Transport.

Bolstering his dream came great news from Ottawa. He had been awarded a government contract to carry the mail from Edmonton to Whitehorse in the Yukon, and presently, all the way right to Dawson City. At last, as did sometimes the prospectors he ferried, he had struck real "pay dirt."

This new mail route lay, McConachie well knew, over the toughest kind of terrain. To ensure dependability for his planes, he immediately began a programme of improvements and innovations. At Fort St. John, Fort Nelson and Lower Post, the government had agreed to establish ground radio and weather stations.

On the shoulders of his company must fall the chore of supplying its own communications system, so that weather reports and service messages could be passed along to the pilots of his planes, which were all to be equipped with two-way radio.

Sharing with his chief pilot, Ted Field, the honour of the inaugural flight, on July 5 McConachie skimmed away from Edmonton with the first Yukon-bound air-mail.

This business of flitting like a magic carpet over the long, long trail of '98 was already pretty much routine stuff to the seasoned pair of pilots, Ted Field having the previous year, in one instance, zoomed over 3200 miles in a single flight to Juneau, Alaska, and back. To the uninitiated, it gave pause for a bit of solemn thought.

"We moved through the air with the greatest of comfort," described reporter Ron Keith. "In slightly more than eleven hours flying time, we spanned the entire trail of '98, a dawn to dusk pleasure excursion over the seemingly endless gold trail that exhausted and broke so many men of iron forty years ago."

This "big break" for Yukon Southern, the mail contract, was to put down foundations for the company that soon were to lead to the most unbelievable chain of consequences for Alberta's capital. Soon the city was to see fulfilment of the "mad" prophecies of "the flying lunatic", General Billy Mitchell, whose men in 1920 first pointed Edmonton's mind aerially to the northwestward.

"An orient route from Chicago to Hong Kong," demonstrated Harbour-master Bell, tracing on a small globe on his office desk the "great circle route" to Asia, "would be 4000 miles shorter and immeasurably safer and cheaper passing through Edmonton."

Suddenly, they were all to be right, all the dreamers envisioning the short aerial route to Asia. Suddenly, in Europe a door slammed shut. And suddenly, in Edmonton in the frontier heart of north-western Canada, a door had to be flung wide open. Destiny was marking the city for a part in a programme beyond the "lunatic" dream of even a General Billy Mitchell.

Meantime, with the sturdy determination of the pioneer, Edmonton plodded painfully forward with the business of enlarging for herself her aerial future. Soon she was to know the gratification of reaching a climactic point in that future.

As with those other headlining flights, her civic readiness to welcome Levaneffsky and her anxious sharing in the search for him seemed again to have bolstered her air stature. This time there were plenty of statistics to measure the actual growth.

"Captain Bell," suggested a report, "is like the old woman who lived in a shoe. He has so many children he doesn't know what to do."

"It's a fact," he proudly corroborated the figure of speech. "A hangar built for twelve planes is now supposed to accommodate forty. Sometimes we have to stack them on end, with blocks holding them in place, so as to crowd more in.

"Forty-two planes," he counted, "are now operating out of the city. Even in ordinary circumstances, an average of three aeroplanes is standing out in the weather for want of hangar space."

Vagaries of climate and the problem of shuttling from wheels to skis to pontoons continued to pose enormous problems for the three air companies, their pilots and their mechanics and their ground crews.

Far off indeed seemed that day when Edmonton and all the

other prairie cities as well as all the far-flung posts throughout the continent-sized hinterland would be furnished with all-weather runways for all-wheeled aircraft.

Presently a new approach to the runway problem was tried out on the Blatchford Field. Although it was late November, and the night-time temperatures dropped well below freezing, Edmonton had little snow.

So at night a liberal stream of water was sprayed on the runway and a three-hundred foot length of ice-coated surface glistened in the morning light. On it Pilots Stan McMillan and Marlowe Kennedy, in ski-shod planes, took off for far northern posts where an already well-established winter would permit them safe landings.

Temporary expedients, however, could not solve the many problems pressing on an air harbour that, despite depression, found its business booming skywards. By now the feel of hard cash in their fingers had taught citizens the value of a policy of airmindedness. But the problem of where the money was to come from to improve the desperate overcrowding and the the lack of up-to-date facilities was a tough one.

"Airports," the burgesses argued, "should be a federal charge."

Finally the city's member of parliament in the federal cabinet at Ottawa, Hon. James A. MacKinnon, turned a sympathetic ear to the pleadings of mayor and council and the Chamber of Commerce.

"The building of hangars," he said, "should be a private venture." But Ottawa would be glad to aid, he eventually was able to promise, with a grant of \$50,000 to be used toward improvement and enlargement of runways, lighting, radio beam and so forth.

Next the problem of the building of a second hangar must be resolved.

Should a municipality build hangars and charge rental space or should it lease ground rights and let the air companies build their own hangars?

Council, pondering the problem, represented a sturdily independent group of ratepayers who had almost from trading post days owned and operated their own utilities.

After the herioc May-Horner flight of January, 1929, Edmonton had seen the light to the extent of plunging the sum of \$35,000 into building of the first hangar. So now again it was decided to ask citizens to dip fingers in pockets for a like sum for the construction of a second hangar.

This time, before election day on November 11, "pass the airport bylaw," became the cry from many new quarters. Backing the pleas of commercial ventures and the newspapers, the Chamber of Commerce invested in a full-page newspaper advertisement with giant-sized type "Vote for the Hangar Bylaw".

"A modern airport is an absolute necessity," it affirmed.

Within the advertisement was reproduced a letter written by Engineer Haddow which painted the predicament of Port-manager Bell. "At present, the only machines we can take into the hangar are those on which work is being done."

Next night, it was evident that even the most budget-conscious burgesses had glimpsed the gleam and had further helped to shape their city's destiny as a new-world capital of the skies. The airport bylaw passed, it was revealed, with "a comfortable margin over the two-thirds vote required."

Because the season of greatest need of hangar shelter was already advancing upon the land, the new building project was begun at once.

In record time it was completed. Still the air business was swelling in size. Still planes had to stand out in all weathers. During the past season a fresh gold strike, in the Yellowknife area on the north shore of Great Slave Lake, had added even more impetus to the air-transport business.

"We need not one, but two new hangars," cryptically observed bustling Leigh Brintnell as he brought in still another new plane for his company and continued to organize the essential subsidiary enterprise, Aircraft Repair Limited.

Before the ring of hammers had ceased on the walls of the brand-new hangar, which was opened in April, 1938, a fresh problem was harassing the city fathers.

With the exception of her air lanes probing into the northland, Canada as a whole was lagging behind other countries, and especially behind her sister to the south, in aviation development.

Through the far-sightedness and generosity of men like James Richardson, and the pluck and initiative of the small independent companies, American interests had been discouraged from invading the promising Canadian field.

To the policy-makers at Ottawa it was obvious that a government-supported company was needed to set up and to maintain a

nation-wide air system. So presently was born the new air baby, Trans-Canada Airlines.

Edmonton, quite naturally, expected to be included in the new link of air-pathways that were to speed mail, passengers and express to and from the tide-washed maritimes, the industrialized east, the far-flung prairies, and over the snow-roofed mountains to the western ocean ports. But the new infant demanded, within Alberta's capital, a cradle all to herself.

Again arose the vexed problem: Who should build the new hangar?

With businesslike acumen, civic authorities shouldered the burden and bore it to the steps of the provincial legislature. Members of the legislative assembly voted their permission.

"Edmonton could spend the necessary money to build a home for the latest member of their air family."

Thus, in the spring of 1938, while workmen still toiled to complete the finishing touches on hangar number two, and while dreamers restlessly waited out the "in-between" season to join the air rush to Yellowknife, hastily tenders were called again for the erection of a third building.

Burgesses could not object to the financing arrangements for this hangar, to be for the exclusive use of Trans-Canada. Within seven years, rentals and other charges would pay back into the city coffers the full cost of the building.

Next, just eighteen years to the day since Wop May and Colonel McLeod had trundled off in the *Jenny Edmonton* to make the first flight of a plane into the Peace River country, came a startling announcement. "165 tons of salt will make runways finest in Dominion. Stabilization programme to begin."

This proposed seasoning of runways with salt was bizarre enough to draw all readers' eyes to the particulars.

In the fabulous region round about McMurray, the sub-station for the Athabasca-Mackenzie air routes, are spilled,—as well as what is reputed to be, in tar sands, the world's largest oil reserve,—tremendous salt beds. From this almost inexhaustible supply, Edmonton proposed to ship out 165 tons.

Under the direction of a city-employed engineer, P. L. Debney, this salt was to be bladed into quantities of gravel on the runways, which were being enlarged and prepared for it out of federal government pocket-money. Next the mixture was to be pressed, under

tremendous weight, to form an all-weather surface claimed to be both "water-resisting and long-wearing."

Beamed civil officials, "Beyond question, now we have the best as well as the busiest airport in the Dominion."

For some time now headlines had been assessing the city's place as the "busiest air centre in Canada," and "the greatest air freighting community in the world."

And Punch Dickins, still superintending for Canadian Airways from Winnipeg, came along to corroborate the claims. "It still holds the spotlight. It is still the busiest air centre in Canada."

Edmonton's air harbour, termed "the portal to a treasure house," had reached a climactic point in its history. It had now become the air capital of the great northland beyond, the Empire North of Sixty.

While in Europe significant events were shaping, during the crisp fall evenings of 1938 Edmonton folk found themselves an exciting new pastime. Uneasily they read how Britain's Prime Minister Chamberlain was laying plans for a top-level conference with a couple of rabble-rousers named Hitler and Mussolini.

Then, for the time being, they cast aside anxiety as they whipped out to watch, at the Blatchford Field, the new wonder of their local world. Sleek and immense, on the runway stood the beautiful new ship, the Trans-Canada mail-carrying plane that lifted away each night for Lethbridge in southern Alberta.

In fact, so many were pressing in to examine the great bird, as many as a thousand at a time on the pleasantest evenings, that special patrols had to be called out to push them back and Captain Jimmy issued a public warning. "Watchers," he pleaded, "are crowding much too closely for their own good."

With the spring month of April, 1939, came a particularly happy time for the proud people of Edmonton. The airport was wearing her new spring look and to the banking account of the city engineer's department arrived a handsome cheque from the federal government at Ottawa.

The cheque presented a refund in the amount of \$69,000, with more yet to come, for work done by the city on improvements to the grounds.

These included the acquisition of more land than had originally



been set aside on the Hagmann estate, and the lengthening, rebuilding and stabilizing of the runways, as well as the extending of power cables, and improved lighting and radio facilities.

One day, while many of the planes and their pilots were enjoying the enforced holiday of the "break-up" season, some fifty of the machines operating out of the city were lined up on the tarmac. From the legislative buildings Premier William Aberhart was invited over to take a look and, as it were, to pay homage to the ships that had brought such acclaim to Alberta's capital.

At the same time, members of the provincial publicity staff arranged for cameras to record the occasion and the display, both of which left no doubt that the city and aviation had reached a climax in their careers.

Happily Premier Aberhart, who as the world's only Social Credit government head shared the spotlight of uniqueness with the capital city's air harbour, exchanged bows with aviation. With pilots and staffs he shook hands, and for one he had a special word of greeting.

It was Sheldon Luck, who had earned the reputation of possessing a markedly appropriate surname. On several occasions he had emerged barely skin-whole from wrestling with death as he piloted planes for Grant McConachie's bush-and-mountain lines in the hazard-crammed Northwest.

Pilot Luck had been a pupil of the premier's back in his Calgary school-teaching days.

Next the cameras were trained on a new seaplane base established on the city's northeastern outskirts. Among the bright array of planes trimly tied up at the new moorings on the muddy Saskatchewan was one belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company.

First to send canoe and York boat over the gigantic spiderweb of waterways threading through the northwest, the ancient "Company of Gentlemen Adventurers" had now fully accepted the new air age. From its base at Edmonton, the "Bay's" twin-engined monoplane, piloted by Harry Winny and Paul Davoud, winged over thousands of miles in the course of business visits to its far-flung trading-post empire.

Like the "Bay" and like the mounted police, many new concerns were following now the lead of such enterprising pioneers as the Northern Aerial Minerals Exploration and Imperial Oil in operating

their own aeroplanes. For several seasons, machines flown by mining engineers and other staff members of Consolidated Mining and Smelting had been harbouring in the city as they skipped back and forth from headquarters at Trail and Creston into northern mineral fields. To W. M. Archibald, pilot-manager of that company, had been awarded the McKee Trophy for 1935 for his tremendous achievements "in establishing the use of aircraft for mining operations and in training personnel in flying technique."

Among his competent staff of geologists and pilots who flew north most frequently from Edmonton were the pioneering Bill Jewitt, Ken Dewar, Ben Harrop, Page MacPhee and Mike Finland.

Even a few individuals were beginning to hop in and out of Alberta's capital in their own privately-owned planes. Most widely known of those who operated a machine for their own work was G. C. F. Dalziel, the "mystery trapper" of the far north.

After one summer's convincingly quick trip out with Wop May, Dalziel enrolled as a pupil with Captain Burbidge, earned his "ticket," and flew north with his own plane. "The whole northland," he chuckled, "will be my trapline from now on."

When presently he flew back with a load of furs to sell, the fuselage of his machine was badly scarred with claw marks inflicted by a curious or hungry grizzly bear.

Into this pleasant picture of aerial achievement for the city entitled by this time to call itself the air capital of Canada, came heart-stopping change. Hitler came marching into Poland.

And the unknown little farming community that had somehow become a kind of air Plymouth and that had graduated into a flourishing air capital of a great northland was again to be near-jolted off her firm-planted feet.

Suddenly she was to take up a new way of life so literally earth-shaking that her quiet citizens were soon to be rocked nightly to sleep by the jittery rattling of their dishes in the cupboards and by the nervous shuddering of their pictures upon the walls.

## 1939-1959

"IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS, the city of Edmonton offers to His Majesty's government at Ottawa the full use of its air harbour facilities."

Such, in substance, at the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, was the wire hustled off to Ottawa by civic officials. Shrewdly they sensed, in this loyal gesture of proffered aid to their own country and to the motherland, profit untold to their city and district.

The invitation was thankfully accepted.

Yes, they were informed, Edmonton would become one of the Canadian centres in a vast commonwealth air training plan. In person, Air Chief Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham arrived to survey the situation.

"The air school at Edmonton," he hinted, "will be one of the largest in Canada."

Then from Ottawa came a proffered agreement which the city's administrators were glad to sign.

Canada, it affirmed, would pay to the city "the sum of one dollar per annum, which sum shall be accepted by the corporation as full compensation for the use of the said airport by His Majesty under the terms of the agreement."

Captain James Bell was to continue as manager under the Royal Canadian Air Force, and under its jurisdiction commercial business was to be maintained as usual. Especially northward and north-westerly, key personnel and services were, at all costs, to be preserved.

Suddenly, the modestly equipped air harbour that had earned the reputation of being one of the world's greatest air-freight centres, was to earn a staggering new reputation.

Almost overnight, it seemed afterward to the city's dazed sons and daughters, she was to become the busiest airport on the North American continent.

Suddenly, the turmoil about her level flanks where prairie buffalo

wool and willow and saskatoon shrub made snug nesting ground for meadow-lark and prairie chicken and partridge, became stupendous. Organized, but stupendous.

The secret for it all lay not only in her wide-spanned fields flinging long arms to her bright clear skies but especially in her strategic position, the strategic position that had favoured her as a natural stopping-place for Post and Gatty and Mattern.

Again destiny was shaping her role in the new earth-shaking events that were soon tumbling a routine world about its ears.

Shortly, the Blatchford Field over which Wop May had so long dreamed and schemed, became a key point in a fourfold activity.

First of all, the commercial companies struggled to maintain the established mail, passenger and freight services. This determined "business as usual" policy they attempted to practise despite the daily loss to the colours of their highly-trained personnel.

Secondly, an immense building programme was initiated by the Defence Department. Being rushed to completion were the units for a complete air training centre to be known as Number Two Air Observer School. Soon flanking Portage Avenue were skeletons of sixteen new buildings, including two hangars, to form the nucleus of the school.

Then Uncle Sam awoke, to realize that twenty years before, General Billy Mitchell had been right after all. Northwestward from Edmonton lay Alaska, brushing the tip of a possible enemy route to America. Canada, too, had become alert to the vulnerability of her northland and under a Permanent Joint Defence Board, set up in 1940, happily agreed to cooperate in every way with American plans for the defence of her Arctic stepchild.

Five years earlier, government officials had investigated the route that Grant McConachie and his pilots had painfully hacked through bush and swamp from Edmonton to the Yukon. Two years before, it had also been inspected by J. A. Wilson, the controller of civil aviation, and he now recommended it to the Defence Board as the most feasible path to Alaska.

This sky-way, christened the Northwest Staging Route, began overnight to hum with feverish activity. So began a third hectic phase of war-fostered effort with headquarters at Edmonton, a huge building

plan along this route enlarging the air-fields already in use and shaping brand-new ones out of the wilderness.

Soon, over this convoy route, a Herculean air-lift to Alaska was being organized. Canadians were to be responsible for maintenance, with Pilot Con Farrell, presently promoted to Wing Commander, named as first officer in charge of it.

At the same time, within the little Alberta capital, there began a third American "invasion." The first she had experienced during the Klondyke gold-rush days, the second in the early years of the next century when the Province's potential in rich farm lands became widely publicized.

Now into the city's borders poured American uniformed men and their families and soon American money was being heaped on that being spent by the federal treasury to transform the hitherto almost-empty expanses about the Blatchford Field. To aid their air-lift programme, the men from the south rushed the construction of a huge hangar and broad runways to accommodate the stream of carriers, fighters and bombers streaking through Edmonton on their way to aid in the defence of Alaska.

Grant McConachie, the freckle-faced lad who had counted on flying in China and afterwards dreamed of the day when he might push a plane route to that country, now smiled happily, "They tell us we have built our air-bridge to Asia."

At the same time he remembered how the pioneering peoples of the frontier settlements along the route he had opened had themselves done much to further his efforts.

At Fort St. John, for instance, now an important base on this new Northwest Staging Route, Grant recalled that residents had put up their own money to establish an airport for his company's use. "Our success," he added, "was based on the cooperation of the people when we needed it most."

Before the war was a year old, the city was to become hostess to still another phase of war-fostered activity.

At his novel Aircraft Repair plant operating under auspices of Mackenzie Air Services, Leigh Brintnell, with Harry Hayter as manager, employed a personnel of about one hundred workers. These now were to form the nucleus of a huge new Aircraft Repair being erected at federal government expense at the north extremity of the Blatchford Field.

So dire was the need for this work to be done that machines began pouring in even before the buildings were ready.

"A hundred Fairey Battles, some in pretty bad shape and full of bullet holes," recalled Hayter afterward, "arrived for us from England. We weren't ready, we had no buildings. But we persuaded Jimmy Bell to let us have some space in an old hangar and we got right to work on them."

Before long, the largest overhaul plant in western Canada was in smooth operation. A staff of near 3000 laboured over as many as thirty different types of planes, including trainers from the Commonwealth Air Training plan, R.C.A.F. machines, all makes of American models, bombers, fighters, transports, as well as the familiar passenger-freighters plying into the north.

Leigh Brintnell, as the busy president of this government-sponsored enterprise, was ready now to listen to offers to buy his Mackenzie Air Services. By this time the Canadian Pacific Railway company was ready to take up the air transport business.

As a matter of fact, Canadian Pacific could claim a definite share in fostering a beginning in air commerce.

Back in 1920 when Edmonton feted General Mitchell's men who were challenging the air trail to Alaska, President D. C. Coleman of the Canadian Pacific Railway had reminded the guests that night that his company was "the first in Canada to obtain, and the only one in the world to hold, a charter for air transport."

This celebrated charter to which Mr. Coleman referred gave it the right "to own and operate aircraft within and without Canada" and it had been obtained in March of 1919.

As a result, almost immediately afterward, on June 6th of the same year, the Air Board Act was passed providing for the regulation of civil aeronautics. There followed the creation of the Air Board and the beginnings of supervised commercial aviation within the Dominion.

Now at last in 1941, President Beatty deemed the time ripe for an air subsidiary to his world-spanning rail and ship services. Negotiations were begun and presently came an announcement heralding sweeping changes. Canadian Pacific had bought out a number of independent air lines, including Mackenzie Air Services and Yukon Southern Transport, and Leigh Brintnell began to shape, for the C.P.R., the new air network.



To a number of the "old-time" air pioneers were presently offered opportunities to assist in the setting up of this new company. Punch Dickins became vice-president and general manager, and Grant McConachie general manager of the western lines with Cy Becker as his assistant and general superintendent in the west. Wop May was in charge of the company's Air Observer School in Edmonton. Also assisting in directing operations in various areas were W. J. Windrum, E. R. "Ted" Field, Walter Gilbert and Barney Phillips, junior, a son of one of Grant McConachie's first backers in Independent Airways.

Guided by such wealth of experience, Canadian Pacific Airlines was soon firmly established on many new-old aerial paths. Around the city no one was surprised to hear Grant say, "When peace comes, we hope to carry the line to China."

This same period also saw the enormous explosion of events that was to rocket round the world and set the very foundations of Edmonton's homes aquivering.

The United States passed her highly-heralded lend-lease act. Germany invaded Russia. Britain and the United States drew up their Atlantic charter. And the latter country extended one billion in lend-lease to Russia.

Then came Pearl Harbour, the United States replying with a declaration of war upon Japan, Germany and Italy declaring war on Canada's neighbour, and Canada too adding a declaration of war upon Japan.

Through Edmonton, that had in 1920 heralded with vast excitement the first official airborne visitors from the south, there began to pour a fresh stream of thousands of American Air Force personnel dropping down from cloud or clear-blue sky to refuel on the long hop to Alaska and the Aleutians.

"For reasons of security," Captain Jimmy Bell shook his head when eventually it was all over, "the complete story can never be told. But I'll never forget a great day in June of 1942 when five hundred planes passed through here, mostly *en route* to Alaska."

These Alaska-bound men and planes flying the Northwest Staging Route formed only a part of the invading army.

"We should have a secondary 'inside' route to Alaska and Asia," decreed the authorities.

With the full cooperation of the Canadian Department of National Defence, a swarm of engineers dressed in the uniform of Uncle Sam began to hustle the building of all-weather airports down the Mackenzie Valley where Punch Dickins had, thirteen years before, blazed the first air trail.

While the year 1942 was still an infant, it was obviously slated to go down in history for another memorable achievement. In the month of February the United States determined to build a highway that would stretch from Edmonton right to Fairbanks in Alaska.

"It can't be done," scoffed residents who knew too well the price of pioneer road-building.

Soon doubting Albertans were being shown that it could and would be done. In unbelievable quantities men and equipment were freighted through the city, by rail to the end of steel at Dawson Creek, by plane along McConachie's "inner sunshine route to Alaska," and to auxiliary airstrips located by the fast-building roadbed.

Nine months later came the word that lost money for the bettors who swore it couldn't be done. The Alaska highway, described as "the greatest piece of road-making yet attempted by man," was completed. It had been hewed through 1523 miles of wilderness right through to Fairbanks.

To give Edmonton a personal picture of the changes already effected in her hinterland to the northwest, late in 1942 a city newsman, Fraser Gerrie, took a ride with Grant McConachie as he piloted a group of government officials over the Northwest Staging Route.

"Magnificent," he described the airport now at Grande Prairie, where eighteen years before Wop May had tangled with wires and buildings in Harry Adair's new Jenny. The same word he used to describe the new fields at Fort St. John and Watson Lake.

On through "wild forbidding country" they soared to the other ports of call, Fort Nelson, Whitehorse, Dawson City. At some points, there was still definitely room for improvement. "At Dawson," reported Gerrie, "the airport was still only a strip in the valley. At moments it was as though the wings were almost scraping the edges of the hills."

Next day his home town was celebrating the opening of her own private gesture toward helping to keep the commercial planes flying. To the tune of \$85,000, she had erected a new centrally located administration building, still of course on the Blatchford Field.

This new "pulse" of the air harbour contained many up-to-the-minute features, such as meteorological station quarters, radio range equipment on a roof topped by a birdcage control tower, as well as offices for Manager Bell and his staff, for T.C.A. and C.P.A. and for Wing Commander Farrell of the Northwest Staging Route.

In keeping with this grand expansion in building, war-office funds provided for the surfacing of all the runways with asphalt and the installing of the latest equipment in lighting.

Along came the day when the Blatchford Field was to see the beginnings of another fantastic project added to its already loaded schedule. A programme of lend-lease to Russia began.

Branded with a bright red star, by the hundreds giant planes began to settle down from the sky. Like the passenger pigeons of an earlier day, in a never-ending cloud they darkened the airways. Round the clock landings and takeoffs were echoed by the day-and-night quaking of the dishes in the cupboards of the city's homes, as planes dropped down and roared off, sometimes at the peak rate of one every ten and a half seconds.

"On September 29, 1943," reported Captain Bell afterward, "we had 860 planes in one day. A record, I believe, for all the North American continent."

Meanwhile, to relieve the congestion round about the airfield, the air training units moved on to Penhold and Claresholm. And the United States Army Engineers selected a spot seven miles north of the city as the site of a supplementary airport.

There farmers patriotically surrendered their land and their homes and Major B. M. Dornblatt of New Orleans moved his Engineers in to take charge of the construction. Sub-contracts were let to Canadian firms.

First chore of the workmen hustling into the job was to scrape off all the rich black loam that had helped to build Edmonton as the nucleus of a prospering farm settlement.

"It's the best thing in the world to grow wheat on," drawled the ruddy-faced Louisiana major, who was now beginning his seventeenth

air harbour since the outbreak of hostilities. "But it's the worst thing in the world to build an airport on."

Sixteen months and seven million dollars later the Namao airfield was completed. Where before green wheat swayed to the tunes of prairie breezes and well-nourished cattle had placidly grazed, now four square miles enclosed the largest air harbour, in area, on the North American continent.

Each 7000 feet in length, two all-concrete runways crisscrossed the vast field. Complete in itself, a tiny city furnished hangars and homes for the American Air force planes and personnel. As part of the number one port on the Northwest Staging Route, immediately on completion it took up the chore of ferrying more and more lend-lease planes to the Russian allies.

Before they moved away from the Blatchford Field, the "Yanks" remembered the obligation of a courteous guest. To their official host, Captain Jimmy Bell, they presented the American Medal of Freedom.

In turn, Captain Jimmy remembered them as most co-operative guests. "They were splendid chaps," he smiled. "There was nothing they wouldn't do for you. Nothing was too much trouble for them."

With the building of the satellite field at Namao, the city's folk too smiled with satisfaction.

"Edmonton is now a true crossroads of world air travel," they bragged.

Already their Blatchford harbour was estimated to have become a six-million dollar investment. At this juncture came further cause for rejoicing.

"Still another five millions," it was announced from Ottawa in the spring of 1944, "is to be spent on the great convoy road to the Orient, the Northwest Staging Route."

By now Con Farrell had been transferred to other wartime duties. Wing Commander W. J. "Packy" McFarlane, a former city resident and commercial flyer, now returned to Edmonton to succeed him. In turn, his place was taken by Group-Captain V. H. Patriarche, another veteran of "bush" flying, who during the copper rush of 1930 had ferried prospectors to the Arctic shore of the Coppermine.

Of the staggering sum to be spent upon improving the route under the new wing commander, Captain Patriarche, over a million and

a quarter was to be used at the first port, Edmonton's Blatchford Field. Giant ships settling down had begun to do just that, sinking deep into the softening asphalt. A new hard concrete was to be surfaced over all the runways.

"That's great news," smiled the seasoned harbour-master. "If all our runways are concrete, they'll be able to carry anything in planes likely to come this way in the next twenty or thirty years."

Already by this time improvements in equipment and harbours were effecting marked change in the long "run" in the Mackenzie valley. One such run by Pilot North Sawle demonstrated the progress and set a new record.

Flying a Canadian Pacific Airlines Lodestar, with Captain Bud Potter as co-pilot, Sawle raced away from Edmonton with his heavily loaded "bird." His destination was Fort Norman. In ten hours and twenty minutes' flying time, he had swooped down again to the Blatchford Field, having made a round trip of 2310 miles.

"Had anyone told me two years ago," he smiled, "that I would fly from Norman to Edmonton in four hours and forty-five minutes, I'd have promptly told that person he was crazy."

Friends, sharing his pleasure, remembered an unusual instance of his flying skill that occurred just before war's outbreak.

It was late summer and a trapper named Andy Hay was due to be picked up from Stinky Lake, a small body of water somewhere near midway between Great Bear and Letty Harbour in a region overflowing with lakes. Rudy Heuss, then senior flight pilot for Canadian Airways in the Mackenzie Valley, had deposited the trapper at Stinky the previous summer, promising to return in a year's time and bring him "out."

The year had elapsed but Rudy lay dying of pneumonia in an Edmonton hospital, too ill to direct others to Stinky Lake. One attempt to locate the trapper failed.

Then Pilot North Sawle took up the hunt. Named for the north and skilled in its lore, Sawle kept the rendezvous for Rudy. Guided only by a scrawled sketch, he found Stinky Lake and Trapper Hay and brought him and his load of furs "out" to civilization.

Meanwhile the new programme bringing change and improvement continued on the Blatchford Field. By the time the glad news that hostilities had ended was speeding round the world, Harbour master

Bell looked out over the enormously expanded airport and breathed a happy sigh of satisfaction.

"Now we have the finest runways possible, capable of handling the heaviest aircraft."

Soon peacetime was to qualify this statement in a new chain of events he could not possibly have foreseen.

Quickly peace began to bring a bustling swell, building to a fresh crescendo of activity.

On June 1, 1946, the Northwest Air Command with headquarters at Edmonton took over from the United States the maintenance and the supervision of both the Northwest Staging Route and the Alaska highway. According to an earlier agreement, Uncle Sam was fully repaid for all the millions spent in northwestern Canada.

This month of June became memorable also for a more personal reason. Grant McConachie, the "discoverer" of the "inner sunshine route to Asia," had won the McKee Trophy for 1945 and his home town arranged a testimonial dinner in his honour.

Commending his "untiring endeavours in opening up the vast hinterland in the northwest," the citation for the coveted award added: "Through his pioneering on the Whitehorse run, the delivery of much-needed aircraft and supplies to Russia was greatly speeded up. His companies were the first to use radio facilities, both in the air and on the ground, and in that part of the country to operate multi-engined aircraft, both of which were major factors in promoting safe aerial transportation."

Forecasting what lay in store for Alberta's capital came a wire from writer Dick Sanburn at Ottawa, "No other city in Canada looms so large in the postwar plans as Edmonton, one of the world's great air centres." It was to have soon, he indicated, "the greatest concentration of R.C.A.F. personnel and planes of any city in Canada."

By the following year, too, the frontier city's air harbour again led all others of the Dominion as the greatest air-freight depot.

By the end of 1947, the city, so long now used to wrestling with air superlatives, had the honour of acquiring still another unique feature. Northwest Air Command, with headquarters at Edmonton, had become the largest air command on home ground in the entire



world, administering an air force covering a geographic area in size more than half of all Canada.

Presently a new-old fever was rocking the city. In 1920 Imperial Oil's discovery near Fort Norman had set planes winging into the then-remote northland. Now in 1947, the same company discovered a well that was practically in the city's backyard, near the tiny village of Leduc.

War and the atomic age with its needs for uranium and new substances had pinpointed attention on that great empire north of sixty, and more mineral fields serviced by the aeroplane were from time to time being opened up. Piled on this, the fresh discovery of a major oil field right outside the city spurred a tremendous upsurge of activity. Soon Edmonton was experiencing her fourth American invasion.

Zooming down from the skies flocked oil-company executives and experienced field personnel whose tongues sounded often of Texas and Oklahoma. Which was to mean that the Blatchford Field, with its fifteen hangars shared by the R.C.A.F. and the civilian companies and the Flying club, was to soar forward to a new high peak of activity.

On an extra busy June day in 1949, 933 machines took off from its broad runways. "An all-time record," beamed the harbour-master, bursting with understandable pride.

In this year, too, many were recalling that youthful dream of McConachie's to fly in China. Summoned to train for trans-Pacific flying for his company were three city pilots, North Sawle, Bud Potter and Archie Vanhee.

The little frontier city was beginning to burst at the seams. With the discovery of one major oil-field after another, it was soon obvious that she was sitting practically on top of a gigantic pool. Soon huge housing developments swallowed up entirely the old Sporle farm from which Wop May and George Gorman had roared forth in the brave *Jenny Edmonton*. Soon they were threatening to surround completely even the new-750 acre Blatchford Field, which in itself was ringed with buildings housing some two dozen related-to-air industries.

Quietly reinforcing its bulwarks, during these troubled postwar

years the R.C.A.F. was preparing to move into roomier quarters at the former American centre at Namao.

Then along came Hercules in a new form. The Dewlift began.

Gigantic flying boxcars began a ferrying programme to assist in the establishing of the Distant Early Warning radar stations in the far north.

Soon the splendid runways that Captain Jimmy had envisioned as lasting practically forever were beginning to show the strain of the great weight of these new leviathans of the skies. And householders, having borne cheerfully all the wartime and postwar-time sky turmoil, began to grow restless at the fresh chain of overhead disturbances.

"Patience," soothed Jimmy Bell. "What is going on is greater than the Berlin airlift. And it won't last forever."

Obviously, for many of the new air giants beginning to race across continents and oceans, a bedding-down spot outside the city might be more desirable. So, on July 22, 1957, Hon. George Hees, federal minister of transport, by mammoth tractor howked out the first sod of a huge international airport to be carved out of farmland twelve miles south of the city.

Again this latest "air" project was to ring up another superlative for the city to digest. This new field, with its estimated expanse of twelve square miles, would be, when completed, the largest in area on the continent.

As for the changes within the city, a reporter reminded the airport manager how long ago the folks used to complain that the noise of aeroplanes racing overhead kept their hens from laying.

"Yes," added Jimmy, "and the mink farmers on the city's outskirts objected too. They claimed the planes were harmful to their mink. Finally their building roofs were marked so our boys would know to avoid flying over them."

Jimmy mused for a moment. "You know," he continued, speaking from the broad experience of twenty-nine years of watchful brooding over the air harbour, "it's strange how nature adapts herself. Out at the Cooking Lake seaplane base, Orville Spooner, the manager there, raises mink right beside the planes. And around the airfield here, when I walk with my dog of a Sunday morning, we often scare up partridges and pheasant. They don't mind the planes, in fact they fly right in the way of them and sometimes get killed. Why, a few

minutes ago I had a phone call. A plane began acting up as it took off. The crew found that starlings were nesting in the exhaust. And at Henry House, outside of Jasper, we hear complaints that the deer are eating the delicate fabric of the aeroplanes."

Though changes precipitated by war had compressed a century's progress to within a few years, and had scattered near and far the pioneering pilots, a few remained who chose to work close to the new-old north.

"It's because of the people there, I guess," reflected Archie McMullen. Rumour reported that Pilot Archie, in thirty years of flying, most of it into the sub-Arctic and beyond the "Circle", had chalked up the highest mileage record among Canadian "bush" pilots.

"Yes," he pondered, "I think it's the people down north. The Eskimos, for instance. If you do something for them, they are so appreciative. And they never forget."

Archie recalled the instance of an Eskimo who had been terribly injured when he had been dynamiting an ice-house at Bathurst Inlet. He had been hurried by boat to Coppermine, from where Archie attempted to get him down to hospital.

"He was so seriously hurt I didn't think much of his chances. The blast had split his jaw, torn his throat and ears and burned his eyes. Someone had smeared him so with Lysol that his head looked like a chunk of cooked liver and he was in such bad shape that if you put soup in his mouth it came out the side of his jaw."

The weather was foggy and bad, but Archie worked his way south, following the Coppermine River and finally reaching Cameron Bay. There D'Arcy Arden, a well-known northerner, and his wife patched up the patient as best they could and eventually Archie was able to get him to hospital at Fort Smith.

"Within a couple of months," Archie related, "that Eskimo was up and walking. Doctor Morrow did such good work that one eye was saved and with the other he could distinguish light and dark. He was so grateful and he never forgot our helping him out."

At another time Archie had brought an Eskimo family ill with typhoid over from Shingle Point to hospital at Aklavik.

"The next winter I was at Coppermine, six hundred miles distant. I didn't know the father of that family was in the locality. He came ten miles in from sealing just to thank me and to bring me a gift.

I showed him that my plane was jammed so full that I couldn't possibly accept the present, an Eskimo stone lamp. He understood, shook hands again and thanked me again. I guess that's why I like to work in the north."

Gradually, following the war, this business of mercy missions and rescue flights became largely the charge of the Royal Canadian Air Force. To the resourceful birdman, Wop May, when he headed the Number Two Air Observer School, went the credit for establishing Canada's first Search and Rescue School.

So often in those days of hordes of planes winging off into the unknown immensities of the north were young fellows getting off course and being forced down and having to be searched for at considerable risk to all.

"There's always someone getting lost. Let's train some of our boys," proposed Wop, "in search and survival lore."

The idea was approved and a special class of volunteers began lessons in physical fitness, medical aid, bush lore, Morse code, dropping supplies and parachute jumping.

In spite of all the vastly improved facilities, the yet-unconquered northland still bristles with many of the hazards and the vicissitudes first encountered by Fullerton and Gorman.

Which has meant that from time to time the planes of the R.C.A.F. must still race forth on missions of mercy, or range out in giant highly-organized searches accompanied by expertly-trained members of the Search and Rescue Squad.

Another organization initiated by Wop May's indefatigable persistence, the Edmonton Flying club, continued over many years to measure up to those first proud records of achievement. In the postwar period, when it became a member of the Association of Royal Canadian Flying clubs, its work came to be watched over by M. D. Maury Fallow. Maury learned to fly under the expert tutelage of Captain Moss Burbidge, and his name, too, presently came to be "a household word" in the Dominion's flying schools.

Bringing the McKee Trophy again to the city in 1949, an Edmonton business man, Dennis K. Yorath, who had himself learned to fly in Calgary in 1928, won the distinguished award for his "unstinted help in and efforts towards" the promotion of private flying within Canada. The next year Fallow in turn won a trophy

donated by Yorath for competition among the members of the Royal Flying Clubs association.

Adding to this prize, as late as 1958, a gold medal for further achievement, Maury was earning the congratulations of citizens as well for new records rung up under his direction. Again that year Edmonton claimed among civilian clubs the proud honour of most hours flown and largest turnout of pilots.

From basic flying knowledge learned in the city's training club stemmed also the blossoming of an aerial subspecies.

In 1950 another local son and apt pupil of Captain Moss, Carl Agar of Leduc, carried off the McKee Trophy. Carl had gone on to become a top-notch helicopter pilot. When the announcement of his award was made, "for outstanding work in the development of helicopter operations in Canada," the folks at home remembered that first cousin of the whirlybirds to appear across the Dominion, that autogyro piloted by Captain Dean during the air pageant of 1931.

There came along another late day to record in Edmonton's aviation history. It was the 20th of February, 1958.

High noon had passed. A dazzling sun was breaking through the soft clouds that had gathered up in their arms all the early morning mist. Frost sparkled on the fairy-fingered tree branches. A pure white blanket of snow carpeted the rock-hard ground.

A crowd of several hundred had gathered at the Blatchford Field. Presently a giant silver and white bird swooped down from the sky. She taxied to a stop outside the airport administration building.

Out of the plane stepped a sleek, dark-hatted and coated business executive. It was Grant McConachie, president of Canadian Pacific Airlines. Mayor Hawrelak and several of the city's business men and a few pilots and ex-pilots stepped forward to shake hands.

From the plane's wide flank, the Mayor pulled a cord. A scarlet banner unfurled, revealing the words, *Empress of Edmonton*.

There followed short speeches by the Mayor, by Grant, by C. W. Carry, president of the Chamber of Commerce.

This monster machine was making local history. She was to be the first on a new flight direct from Edmonton to Amsterdam.

"Tonight," said Grant, "we'll be in Greenland. Tomorrow we'll be in Amsterdam."

This wonder cruiser of the new age was also to be the first, he said,

to use radar. It would be able to see weather up to forty miles ahead, thus avoiding storms and bumpy atmosphere conditions.

Soon the great ship was circling over what had been the old Hagmann fields, and the swamp and the brush that had been the haunt of ducks and prairie chicken and partridge.

Only a few fluffs of cloud now mottled the brittle blue of the sky. The fresh south breeze whispered to the giant air whirl stirred up by the enormous propellers of the great plane. The ceiling and the visibility were unlimited.

Unlimited, too, were obviously the possibilities that lay ahead.

Meantime, those about the city who long ago had envisioned the dawn of the new air age formed themselves into a novel kind of association, The Quarter Century Club. Patterned after a first club shaped in Vancouver, its membership of more than forty embraced men whose work had been linked for twenty-five years or more with Canadian aviation.

First president of the new club was another inventive individualist, T. P. "Tommy" Fox, the president of Associated Helicopters Limited. Early in his career in the skies over in British Columbia, Tommy had built and flown his own aeroplane. And on the roster of names of those helping to direct the club were represented many pioneer phases of "bush" flying—Jack Moar, Fred Lundy, Harry Hayter and A. N. "Westy" Westergaard.

As with that little Edmonton Air Force Association formed almost forty years before, among the topics at its meetings reminiscence rated first. Reminiscence now of a quite different kind, reminiscence of those days of the golden twenties and thirties when Edmonton and the northwest were first trying wavering wings on the flight toward fame.

Persistently the newer generations of citizens were seeking to learn from these old-timers how they had achieved their goals. How they kept on the wing with no money, no landing-fields, almost no maps and weather reports and no navigation aids. Was it true, they asked, that back in those days a pilot simply flew by the seat of his pants?

"So you're one of those early bush pilots," a brash youngster accosted Leigh Brintnell. "One of those who flew by the seat of their pants!"

"Young man," bristled Brintnell. "I'd like you to know that I still have my pants."



"How did I fly then?" he repeated after the youth. "Why, it was a matter of using common sense," he added more kindly. "A matter of using everything, of watching the weather, learning the terrain, reading carefully what information there was and of taking no wild chances.

"I can remember times when I'd be down somewhere with a party of geologists. I'd see signs in the sky that meant we should get going. I'd tell the men we should be on the way because I wasn't too sure of my engine. If I'd told them there was bad weather coming, probably they wouldn't have believed me."

"That's right," echoed Con Farrell. "There was that cardinal rule for us all. Never take chances. Though I guess, too, that every pilot was a bit of a fatalist. But I used to say that I'd rather be the oldest man alive than the smartest one dead."

"That one time," Con added with a wry grin, "that I broke the rule, I paid for it."

"I figured it was up to each man to look to his own safety," mused Archie McMullen, the man with the amazing record of survival. "You were allowed seven days. If, after that, you were still unreported, they came and looked for you.

"As I worked along into new territory, I always called on the mountie stationed there. From him I filled in details of the area on my own map, which was usually most incomplete. And I marked down locations of any cabins along the route. If that cabin had a stove, I marked that down too."

Often, recalled Archie, a pilot had to put down most unexpectedly on a bitter winter's night. For instance, one stormy day his brother-in-law, Gil McLaren, was following him downriver heading for Providence. "Gil was about twenty minutes behind and dark was coming on. When he saw he might not make it, Gil did the wise thing. He sat right down on the ice on Great Slave Lake and he and his mechanic sheltered for the night under the plane's engine.

"Knowing you could be reasonably comfortable during the night," reflected Archie, "made all the difference. So I always carried a small tent, a little camp stove, a good thick caribou hide which I put skin side down under my sleeping bag, and a slab of frozen beans. I figure that many a time knowing I could set myself up for the night was what saved me."

As for the honours showered upon these adventurers for their pioneering, these had become, during those evenings of remembering, the theme of much good-natured joshing.

To celebrate Canada's fifty years of aviation, the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce plunged for a great bang-up celebration in the Macdonald Hotel, a dinner in honour of the "bush" pilots of the city and of the northwest.

Among those who flew in the farthest to attend the affair was Air Marshal C. Roy Slemon. Soon he was renewing acquaintance with such fellow-flyers as Jack Moar and Norm Forester and recalling those days of the early twenties when they had all ranged out, doing patrol, mapping and photographic surveys for the R.C.A.F. far and wide over northwestern Canada.

In honour of those whose man-made wings were the first to fly over many an unknown region, a number of geographic features, particularly lakes, have been named for them. So busy and full have been their lives that some have yet to locate those lakes bearing their names.

"I haven't yet seen that lake in Alberta called after me," smiled Punch Dickins.

"And I sure would like to be able to find mine," added Archie McMullen. "I want to get an aerial picture of it."

"I hunted for hours once looking for one named for me in Manitoba," chuckled Air Marshal Slemon. "Finally an old-timer told me why I couldn't find it. 'This is August,' he grinned at me. 'You have to come looking for that lake in the spring. It dries up by July.'"

It was a highlighting night out of a week and a year of remembering. And of honouring as well those who were gone, Wop May and Andy Cruickshank and Paul Calder and the others. Especially, for Edmonton and the great debt she owed him, of honouring Wop May, —and of honouring the air crews and the flight engineers who kept the planes flying.

Introduced by the chairman, Carl Clement, new president of the Chamber of Commerce, were speakers who needed no introduction—Jimmy Bell, Grant McConachie, Punch Dickins, Leigh Brintnell,—all prophets being honoured in their own lifetime in their own country.

For Captain Jimmy, it was his finest hour. His dark eyes glowed

with the rich memories of years as he drew upon his happy knack of recalling highlights from the intricate tapestry of the past.

"Gentlemen," he beamed, "here's Moss Burbidge, who claims I gave him some bad moments one night in the air during that First World War . . . and here is Stan McMillan, the pilot who got lost flying with that MacAlpine expedition and who redeemed himself later by his wizard skill in that rescue at Letty Harbour. . . .

"Here's Don McLaren, that celebrated first-war ace who later helped to fly the prairie mail . . . and another who flew the prairie mail, Con Farrell, who has an island named for him in Frye Lake so that future generations will recall how he broke his own rule. . . .

"Here we have Archie McMullen, who should have been a trader because he knows every Indian and Eskimo between Edmonton and Aklavik . . . and here, too, is Ken Saunders, who was our aviation inspector here for so many years and who is the only Canadian I know whose flying certificate was signed by Orville and Wilbur Wright . . . and Ken Hollick-Kenyon, one of the first men to fly over the Antarctic. . . ."

The tide of memory flooded on, with more and more names and more and more incidents weaving into his picture of the past.

Soon someone was recalling even that old legend concerning Punch Dickins and the Eskimo. At Aklavik in a special court session an Eskimo stood giving evidence. His dark features were heavy with mental effort as he groped for the English word for aeroplane. Suddenly a great light dawned on his face. He'd thought of the word. "Punch Dickins," he said.

Then Jimmy was citing an apt illustration of the many facets in the rugged life of a bush pilot.

"I'll never forget," said he, "one special day when 'Monkey' Sherlock brought his plane down here on the Blatchford Field."

Captain W. N. "Monkey" Sherlock was a First World War pilot who had flown also in Persia, Mesopotamia and India before coming, in 1930, to Edmonton to fly north for a period with Commercial Airways. "Monkey" had a lively flair for the dramatic.

"As he stepped that day from his plane," related Jimmy, "he wore a cap at the front of which he had fastened a stencil marked 'Pilot.' As he helped out his passengers, maybe a trapper or two and a couple of Indians, he whisked his cap round to a stencil that read 'Passenger Agent.' Then, as he turned to assist with the baggage

and the payload, he rotated his stencilled cap again. This time it read 'Baggage Master.'

"Ah well, boys," mused Jimmy. "It's all slipstream behind us now."

Soon the alchemy of time would transmute into more and more colourful legend the great flying annals of the city's past, the annals that had made her the air Plymouth of the new world.

This process, predicted Captain Jimmy, would go on and on.

"Today the little lads brandish guns as they shout, 'I'm Matt Dillon or I'm "Matt Basterson." Have gun. Will travel.'

"In the generations to come, the small boys will be hollering as they weave toy aeroplanes through the air, 'I'm Matt Berry. Have aeroplane. Will return.'"

Already the space age was looming, beginning already to rub the bloom off the new jet age.

"As for the future," said Grant, "anything can happen. And probably will."

The city's people, knowing what they knew, seeing what they had seen, were ready to believe him.

Yet to them, no new marvel could match the marvels they had already seen, the wonders they had already known.

For a few old-timers, there had been the unbelievable delight of watching the little plane fashioned by Reginald Hunt, with a tiny propeller modelled on a fan to keep flies from sleeping in restaurants, and the joy of following its falcon-like flight through the sky.

For a later generation, there was the sheer magic of Wop May's zooming overhead, or like a falling leaf spiralling straight down sky, or gaily playing tag with himself in the old Jenny *Edmonton*.

For them and for a growing generation, there was the incredible spectacle of Punch Dickins in a silver Siskin, daring to climb up, up, in the frozen sky above Jasper Avenue as the temperature dropped down, down.

Or the marvel of a *Winnie Mae* glistening in the golden glow of dawn, the *Winnie Mae* that, homing from right round the world, had twice contrived to find her way down among them.

Whatever next might happen, Edmonton would be ready.

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Eugenie Louise Myles is the daughter of a pioneer family. She completed the honours course in English at the University of Alberta, where she won prizes in English and History and where she worked under the celebrated E. K. Broadus who urged her to write. After graduating from the Calgary Normal School, she taught for two years, worked briefly in the Department of Education, and was on the staff of the *Edmonton Journal* for several years. She married Ernest Myles and has a son and a daughter. Her first book, *North Pole Boarding House*, written in collaboration with Elsie Gillis, appeared in 1951. She has had a number of children's stories published, won a provincial I.O.D.E. prize for a book-length fiction manuscript, was an assistant editor of the Alberta Jubilee Anthology, contributes book reviews regularly to a newspaper column, and is currently working on two more book-length manuscripts. Representing *The Edmonton Journal*, Mrs. Myles attended the past two coronation ceremonies in Westminster Abbey.

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